

Walk Your Own Talk...If You Don't Follow Your Own Recommendations, Who Will?

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“What would you do?” How often have you been asked that question by a client struggling with a difficult medical decision? Many veterinarians are reluctant to respond openly because well, we aren't the caregiver of this particular pet. Some of the issues faced are extremely emotional...end of life treatment, aggressive cancer therapy, euthanasia. Clearly we wrestle with these same decisions when faced with them in our own pet care. Some are irreversible and some are expensive and some involve moral or ethical dilemmas. Some are less stressful and we feel very comfortable with strong recommendations. Surgical sterilization, vaccination, parasite control and prevention, dental and nutritional care...all are pretty easy to recommend and speak for. We feel comfortable almost directing owners to do them. “What would you do” is easily answered. We know that vaccines are safe and effective. We know that parasite control products are safe and effective and we know that proper dental care and nutrition enhance the health and quality of life of pets. “What do you do?” can sometimes be a bit more interesting.

Physicians are important role models for their patients and peers, which makes their own personal health an influential factor in health promotion and disease prevention. Recent studies have shown that physicians who practice healthy behaviors for themselves are more likely to talk to their patients about these topics. Undoubtedly the same is true of veterinarians. Add to the clients we serve social and family members who look to us for indirect recommendations and frequently as “Do I have to do that?”

In a study of 500 primary care physicians around the country, researchers at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine found that a doctor's own size influenced how he or she cared for patients with weight problems. Overweight or obese physicians were less likely to discuss weight loss with heavy patients: only 18% of these doctors discussed losing weight with their patients while 30% of normal weight physicians did.

What's more, the researchers found that 93% of doctors diagnosed obesity in their patients only if they believed their own weight was equal to or less than that of their patients; only 7% of doctors who believed their weight exceeded that of their patients diagnosed obesity.

It stands to reason that veterinarians who practice good dental care on their own pets are better positioned to recommend routine complete dental care. Veterinarians and staff members who are concerned about proper pet nutrition and body condition are more likely to advocate for these health issues.

Do you vaccinate your pet on the same schedule you recommend as a protocol? Do you vaccinate your own pets in accordance with risk assessment? Do you consider the potential of non core diseases and vaccinate accordingly?

Expert recommendations from CAPC and from the American Heartworm Society and more recently the AAHA and AVMA Preventive Healthcare Guidelines are simple and clear. Every dog and every cat should be protected all year round regardless of where they live. Do you follow these guidelines as recommendations for your patients? Do you practice what you preach?

Our clients, friends and family look to veterinarians and their staff as examples of best care. Do you recommend and advocate for the protocols established in guidelines? If you don't support the guidelines it is likely that you do not advocate for them. And if you don't implement them in the care of your own pet it is likely that you do not offer them as best care for your patients.

Guidelines are not legal documents and a decision not to comply is not a violation of some code. On the other hand adoption and integration of these guidelines insures that you are providing best care for your own pets and assures that your clients are at very least receiving a recommendation of a best care recommendation and the knowledge that you feel strongly enough to apply them for your own pet care.

Do what you say you will do...to advocate for the best care available to your clients and patients.