A Veterinarian’s Call for An Affordable Standard Of Care

Dr. Jan Pol

When I came to America more than 40 years ago to marry my beautiful wife Diane, with nothing in my pocket besides my veterinary degree, I paid close attention to the Emma Lazarus poem inscribed on the base of the Statue of Liberty, which begins, “Give me your tired, your poor…” Well, I thought, I’ve come to the right country! Over time, through a lot of hard work and my hand up the backside of more cows than I can count, I have managed to achieve the American dream. But I have never forgotten where I started and what it was like to have nothing but my love for my family and for animals.

My philosophy on veterinary ethics is simple: “First Do No Harm!” And for me, this philosophy applies to the owner, as well as the patient. In practice, that means applying a common sense approach to treatment and care.

Veterinary medicine has changed dramatically over the years as the emphasis moved from the farm to small animals. Many of the small, community-based vets have been replaced with larger companies operating numerous practices. There is an increased emphasis on the profitability of the practice, and vet services costs have skyrocketed, at a higher percentage than even human healthcare, with advances in medicine and treatments.

I know from experience that my clients are most vulnerable when their animal is in pain. No owner wants an animal to suffer because medical care is unaffordable. So many people will spend whatever it takes -- and all too often, more than they can afford--to provide treatment for their animals. For some clients, a $200 dollar vet bill can mean the difference of having food on the table that week or not. For me, the animal always comes first. Always. But care for the animal doesn’t have to come at the expense of the owner and their family.

Having treated more than 500,000 animals in my career, I rarely see a problem I haven’t seen many times before. The question I ask myself when I see a patient is “What do I have to do to reach the best possible outcome, in the fairest and most economical way possible?” There is a great deal of new technology and new techniques that have become available to vets. Using the new technology and techniques, however, doesn’t guarantee a different medical outcome, but they can drastically increase the cost of care either because they simply cost more or take more manpower to use.
Affordable care doesn’t mean substandard care, and to imply that would be misleading. We have most of the best equipment in our clinic – we have a state of the art hematology machine, blood chemistry unit, lasers, and even gas anesthesia -- and we use them when it can make a difference. But when conducting expensive tests or procedures isn’t going to change the diagnosis or the prognosis, the responsible thing to do is not burden my clients with a large unnecessary bill.

I am very honest with my clients. I tell them what to expect and what treatment options are available and their costs. I don’t want any surprises when they open the bill. I let my clients make the choice. If we don’t have the equipment or expertise to help an animal, we will refer the owner to someone who can.

The best judge of my care and techniques are my clients. I have kept many of my clients for decades because I provide affordable, common sense vet care. And I have humanely cared for and treated hundreds of thousands of animals and pets successfully. Many of my clients have become my friends, and we have lived through the lives of many animals together. A proud moment for me was when I was talking to a new client, only to discover that she was the fifth generation to call herself a client of Pol Veterinary Services.

It saddens me when I get letters from countless fans across the country who are in despair because they cannot afford the care their animals need. Unfortunately, states are taking the decisions of pet care out of the vets’ discretion. Through law and regulation, they are forcing veterinarians to adopt a standard of care that is less affordable for the client. The decision-making is being taken away from the consumer and the veterinarian, and put in the hands of government. Unless we act now, we may see millions of pets with owners who are unable to afford to take their animals to the vet. After all, animals do not have the same rights as humans. Owners have the option to euthanize or surrender to overburdened rescue organizations any animal they cannot afford to keep or care for. I believe there are far too many animals euthanized, abandoned or left to recover or die, because their owners cannot afford the care that their animals need. This is the silent animal cruelty in our country, and there should be a solution to end this. I don’t think the Statue of Liberty stood for this, and I certainly don’t.