

## Comment on Pet Medications Workshop

To Whom It May Concern:

In this comment on pet medication issues I will discuss some ideas concerning different aspects of the availability and cost of pet medications. The topics discussed will include business, distribution, availability, and cost issues related to pet medications. These topics will be discussed for the Distribution Practices in the Pet Medications Industry and Prescription Portability for Pet Medications sections requesting public comment.

Over the years I have made many trips to veterinarians to take my pets in for anything from regular check ups to serious health problems and injuries. The prices of these vet visits have continually increased as have the remedies for my pets' problems. While it is understandable that prices will increase to a certain extent, I find it interesting that prices of these vet visits vary from location to location.

I have found that the cost of a visit to the vet is not indicative of the care you receive. As a matter of fact, I have found that many times the vets that are cheaper provide better care and are much more reasonable to work with. This is most likely a product of the character of the veterinarian as much as anything. However, in my experience these "cheaper" veterinarians are the ones that are following the method the proposed bill would require.

In fact, the veterinarian that I currently use has, on a number of occasions, recommended that I have prescriptions filled at pharmacies other than the vet's office because the price of the medication is cheaper at these outside pharmacies. These truthful practices have led to me trusting and referring my veterinarian to many other pet owners. My concern, though, is with the veterinarians that require one to fill the prescription at the Vet's own office.

My concern is not just with the inability to shop around for better prices, but what the motivating factors are for a veterinarian to require that the medication only be filled within his or her own office. My first thought is that this is just another method for the vet to make money. The vet's prescription medication prices tend to be higher than what you can get through other retailers such as 1-800-Petmeds and pharmacies.

One of the arguments that the veterinarians put forth as a reason to not require written prescriptions is that the vet can monitor them and make sure that the pet prescriptions are accurate and comply with dosing requirements. I find this comical, as it implies that the pharmacists that fill human prescriptions aren't capable of filling pet prescriptions. However, I can understand this argument in regards to having a company such as 1-800-Petmeds fill a prescription, since this type of pet medication supplier is not a typical pharmacist. The market and law should take care of this problem. The law could take care of the problem by placing liability on the companies filling the prescriptions.

The market will also take care of this problem because consumers will no longer use the suppliers/retailers if they are not accurately filling prescriptions.

### **Economic Effects of the proposed bill**

The economic effects of the proposed bill would be huge for the consumer. This is because it would allow for competition between suppliers/retailers. This competition would lower prices of prescription, thus making them much more affordable. This would greatly benefit the lower income pet owners by potentially making the medications their beloved pets need much cheaper.

The request for comments on this topic mentions the increased availability of flea and tick medications. This increase in availability is greatly due to the ability of many different retailers to market and sell these medications/treatments. The increased availability and reduced costs of these and other over the counter pet medications are good examples of how the prescription pet medication world can benefit from competition in the retail arena.

If we allow veterinarians to continue to require that their patrons purchase pet medications from the vet's own office, we are effectively limiting the availability of affordable pet care. Furthermore, we are giving a form of monopolistic power to the veterinarians. This monopolistic power comes from the fact that the vet not only performs the service but also requires that the client purchase the medication, which is a by-product of the service from the vet's own office, at the price the vet sets.

This is exacerbated by the fact that if the consumer cannot afford or chooses not to purchase the medication from the veterinarian, then they would still have to pay for the office visit with no medication to cure what the pet was diagnosed with. The consumer would then have to take their pet to another veterinarian's office and have the pet re-evaluated by this second vet. The consumer will have to again pay for the vet visit to get a medication or prescription from the second vet. This seems very inefficient, redundant, and archaic.

Pet owners love their pets and spend large amounts of money on them as indicated by the statistics from the American Pet Products Association Industry Statistics & Trends stating that Americans spent in the ballpark of \$50 billion on their pets in 2011. Obviously this is not a small industry that needs protection, but that's what we would be doing by denying this legislation. We would be protecting a veterinarian's ability to extract large amounts of money from their clients because the vets can set their prices for the prescription medications.

Requiring a veterinarian to provide their clients with a written script does not prohibit the vet from also providing the medication to the client. It merely requires the vet to compete with other suppliers/retailers of pet medications on price. Furthermore, this could allow for people to provide better care to their pets, which could increase vet visits. This could result from pet owners having more money to spend on their pets because they

are not spending that money on prescriptions. They could in turn spend that money on regular vet visits or it may free up money that they can spend on preventative measures.

Preventative measures, such as heartworm prevention in dogs, are very important in many regions of this country. Heartworms are transmitted to dogs through mosquitos and can be deadly to a dog if not caught in time. To get heartworm prevention medicine, one needs to first have their dog checked by a vet for heartworms because administering the medicine to a dog with heartworms can have fatal consequences. However, because of the cost of heartworm prevention medication, many people cannot afford this medication.

The high costs of these preventative medications along with the high costs of vet visits continues to be prohibitive in assuring that our pets have the care they need. Pet care should not be available only to those who are fortunate to have enough money, when we can create legislation that can effectively decrease the costs of pet care without costing the government money. This also coincides with the way we deal with prescription drugs for humans. When a human doctor prescribes a drug, we aren't required to have it filled at the doctor's office. We have a choice of pharmacies in which we can fill those prescriptions.

### **Consumer Choice and Entry into the Market**

Consumer choice and entry into the market are also greatly affected by the current system. If a vet requires a client to purchase the prescription pet medication from the vet's own office, then the vet completely controls the medication brands that the vet carries and therefore controls the brands that the consumer uses. Further entry into the market could be difficult because one has to get the vet to agree to carry the new product.

If this law is passed, then the consumer will be able to choose between name brand and generic pet medication because they will be able to choose how the prescription is filled through the retailer. The availability of choices to the consumer creates competition between the drug companies and theoretically should lower prices. Under the current system the veterinarian can choose which brand of medication that the client will use. The vet may get certain "kick-backs" form the drug companies to push a certain drug. In this case, the vet does not even have to push the drug; they merely have to prescribe it. This means that not only does the veterinarian benefit from selling the drug to the client, but they can benefit from the drug company too.

The American Veterinary Medical Association states on page 3 in their comment on this issue that under the practices of this bill, "consumers would be anticipated to have more purchasing options." These purchasing options are important not only in the fact that they create completion, but they also allow an alternative should there be a problem with one type of drug. This alternative could be more readily available in a market where it is already available than it would be in a market where it is restricted due to lack of veterinarian support based on a business decision.

Furthermore, the current system makes it difficult for a new drug to enter the market. This is because a veterinarian may not already carry the drug. Therefore, it is not available even if a client requests the drug, and the client cannot go to another retailer to get it. If this law were put in place, then all the client would have to do is go to another pharmacy to get the drug that they choose. An independent source, such as the pharmacist, could then educate the client/buyer on the new drugs or generics that may be available. This would ensure a greater level of choice for the client and would allow newer, potentially cheaper drugs to enter the market.

### **Efficiencies and Inefficiencies**

There are obvious efficiencies to the proposed system in that it allows clients to use retailers that are versed and are dedicated to dealing with pet medications. Moreover, this would allow veterinarian offices to use their space more efficiently in that they would not need to keep a fully stocked pharmacy at the vet office. The American Veterinary Medical Association makes a good point in their comment on this bill when they bring up that this greatly benefits mobile vets who cannot carry all the medications, as they don't have the room. This law would create a competent system that is educated in pet medication because there would be a market in it. Thus veterinarians could focus on their vet practice and less on the pharmacy and maintaining an adequate supply of medications in stock.

The inefficiencies would be minimal but they would include the lack of education in regards to pet medications by pharmacists and the fact that the current retailer system may not be large enough to accommodate the demand. These inefficiencies would be more on the trend of growing pains than inadequacies. The pharmacies could employ pet medicine specialists or the pharmacists could be trained in pet medication. Furthermore, the problems of increased demand would be attenuated by the availability of drugs from the vet office if one chose to purchase the drugs from them.

### **Conclusion**

This bill has the potential to greatly help the welfare of pets and their owners if it is enacted. The increase in consumer choice from where to have the prescription pet medications filled to which brand of the medication they wish to purchase creates competition that will help lower the price of the pet medications. The law would additionally allow clients the freedom to choose a veterinarian that they feel will provide the best care without the fear of having to purchase the medication at the price set by that veterinarian.

This bill does not just affect the method in which we fill our pets medication. This bill has the ability to increase the availability of preventative health measures for pets, which under the current system can be so costly that many pet owners cannot afford them.

Respectfully,  
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