

August 30, 2012

Commission members,

The veterinary profession is founded on providing compassionate care for our patients. The human-animal bond is now recognized as a real and substantial societal element. Owner expectations for pet longevity and quality of life have increased significantly over the last 40 years. As a result, demands for level of care are greater. Fortunately, veterinarians have been able to meet and often exceed these expectations. Advances in knowledge, vaccines, nutrition, diagnostics and medications are responsible for doubling the average life expectancy for a family owned dog in this same time frame.

Many of these improvements are the result, either directly or indirectly, of evolution of the human medical profession. Our patients have available MRI/CT imaging, digital radiographs, laparoscopic and endoscopic surgery, in house and reference laboratory testing, computerized medical records, telemedicine, specialty referral networks, continuing education requirements, licensed nurses, among others.

Practicing veterinary medicine, however, remains much different from our counterparts. Each practice is a small business entity owned by veterinarians. Culture, standards and fees are set individually depending on the needs of the business and practice. Business operations are the sole responsibility of the practice owner. Facility, staffing, equipment, inventory, bookkeeping, marketing and management fall directly on the small business owner. Fortunately, insurance companies have not influenced the manner in which veterinarians practice. Our profession is efficient, accurate, compassionate and affordable, entirely due to the veterinary/owner management. Pet owner visits and the fees incurred are controlled and checked by the local, competitive market, just as any small business. Costs of medications and services are the direct result of staying competitive and managing and controlling other expenses. Clients will not return if fees are too high. No one knows that more than the small business owner. Demanding that a third party become involved in the visit will, with all certainty, lead to overall increase in veterinary expenses for the pet owner.

Human pharmacies have no concern about the owner or pet's visit. There is no incentive to keep medication costs reasonable; in fact much the opposite. Human pharmacists have no veterinary pharmacology training. They are unable to inform the client about the efficacy, safety, usage, and potential risks of many drugs that are used in the veterinary field. Veterinary licensure allows for the operation of pharmacy services for our patients only, but not for humans. Why then should the opposite be true? Dogs and cats are not people and have many different physiologic and metabolic differences. Mistakes, consumer problems and pet morbidity will invariably escalate, and eventually result in pet deaths. The veterinary will be burdened with this newly created scenario. This will indirectly increase overall business expenses, and subsequently pet owner costs.

Private veterinary practice is challenging and highly competitive. The marketplace ultimately determines fees for the consumer, as it does in all small businesses. The veterinarian, who is a small

business owner in this market, is best at determining the appropriate medication and appropriate cost for the pet and the owner. This, in turn, will allow the overall cost of high quality veterinary visits to remain affordable.

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