



COMMUNITY VETERINARY MEDICINE PROGRAMS: PERCEPTIONS OF PET OWNERS AND EXPERIENCES

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ABSTRACT

Many pet owners are struggling financially, and the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated this problem. Nevertheless, the positive impact of companion animals on people's lives creates a need for support systems to ensure that financial constraints and other barriers do not prevent pet ownership. Various forms of veterinary medicine programs have been developed across the country to overcome these barriers and help underserved communities. In addition to perceptions of veterinary services, this study focused on communication and respect; Two additional elements necessary for successful community-based veterinary programs. In conclusion, low-cost or free veterinary programs—with effective communication, empathy, and cultural competence—can help open the door to positive future veterinary experiences for owners of disadvantaged pets.

Bringing pets into the household has many physical, emotional and social consequences profit Studies examining the benefits of pets for vulnerable populations also show positive effects. Schmitz et al. For example, it found that LGBTQ+ youth report that their pets play an important role in managing major life stress and depression. Studies involving homeless people has found that their pets provide them with many benefits, including security, personal accountability, and improved emotional and mental health. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbates this problem. This means that many families are struggling to pay their bills, including the ability to afford veterinary care to keep their pets happy and healthy. However,

companion animals have many positive effects shows the need for support systems in people's lives to ensure that financial constraints do not prevent pet ownership. Lack of access to veterinary care is not simple financial problem. There are many barriers to veterinary care has been identified and it is necessary to solve it all support for vulnerable pet owners. Financial barriers are the most common and create the most stress veterinary profession, other barriers include working hours, geographical location, transportation, equipment for transportation pets, culture/language issues, and vet-client an unfortunate consequence of communication is that these barriers do not adequately serve low-



income communities that are often neglected by animal care providers. Nevertheless, increased access to veterinary care in low-income areas can help reduce animal overpopulation, improve animal welfare, and overall community health.

In order to help overcome these barriers and help them in the regions, many communities have implemented some form of community-based veterinary medicine programs. Community-based veterinary medicine initiatives are seen as one way to address the lack of access to veterinary care among the underserved. community veterinarians are important in the development of positive relationships and experienced players with pets through education and veterinary service owners. Despite the growing number of community veterinarians and medical initiatives, little research has been conducted subject, the most published works focus on veterinarians and student opinions or customer demographics. That is why, the quality of these programs, as well as their impact on the target population, is largely unknown. It is suggested that there is a need for empirical research investigating the effectiveness and potential impact of these community initiatives. Given the important impact of good communication between Veterinarians and pet owners can take care of their pet's health, with special attention given to this important element of study successful community-based veterinary programs.

Perceptions of veterinary care experience : Pet owners have access to care from MVC and APCC programs were asked a few questions about their latest veterinary experience. The majority owners rated both programs very positively. These areas

MVC received the lowest relative ratings for software how well the vet explained the treatment and included procedures and how long they may take

vet - but both of these areas were rated "good" (the most positive answer) more than 80% of respondents. Areas APCC received the lowest score for the program, relatively which included questions related to interest in other fields veterinarian in his comments, discussion veterinarian about treatment options and costs/fees visit. However, all these areas were rated as "good" by more than 80% respondents. Owners were also asked how important it was The veterinary care they received helped to keep them Domestic animal. Most owners reported for both programs the care they received was very important (APCC: very important= 86.9%, mean significant = 9.8%, not significant = 3.3%; MVC: very important = 87.5%; not important = 12.5%).

DISCUSSION

Pets are seen as important members of the family for many, offering happiness, comfort and support. Yet, many families struggle to provide their pet the veterinary care they need to stay healthy. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, it was estimated that 23 million pets live with impoverished families and this problem has only been exacerbated with the pandemic. Further, numerous shelters have reported substantial adoption rate increases as people have been spending more time at home.

The financial ramifications of COVID-19, as evidenced in the current study, have not impacted all groups of people equally; unemployment rates for young Black and Hispanic men and women, for example, are much higher than that for young White



men and women. Employment changes due to COVID-19 can be seen within this study's sample. While some might propose that people without the financial means to care for a pet should not have one, we argue that it is not acceptable, nor ethical, to deny families the option to have a pet due to barriers in accessing veterinary health care. As noted by Wiltzius et al. suggesting that people with limited means should not have pets is an "untenable solution". Additionally, with research suggesting that pets play a critical role in mitigating COVID-19 related stress, and numerous antidotal reports that pet adoptions have dramatically increased since the pandemic began, it is more critical than ever to support these vulnerable pet owners. Assisting these families that struggle with financial constraints that prevent them from accessing veterinary care could help them keep their pets at home. To address these barriers, many communities have created a variety of low-cost or free veterinary programs. Yet, not everyone is supportive of such programs. There is a common misconception that providing discounted or free veterinary services will take paying clients away from nearby veterinary hospitals, despite the fact that studies have consistently shown that the majority of owners accessing these services have not seen a veterinarian before. Our study found similar results, whereby 55% of pets seen through the MVC and 43% seen at the APCC had never been to a veterinarian before. While cost is the most common barrier to veterinary health

care, as well as a determinate factor in relinquishment decisions, financial limitations are not the only barrier to veterinary care that must be addressed. Accessibility and transportation are additional key components that must be considered to ensure pets receive the care they need. It is not enough to make veterinary care affordable; it must also be easily accessible. Transportation is a potential barrier that poses unique challenges for veterinary care. Owners without a car may be forced to rely on public transportation that does not allow animals. Alternative options, such as private transportation in the form of taxis or Uber rides, if available in their community, can be cost prohibitive. This lack of transportation can be a challenge even if a veterinary clinic is just a few miles away. There is a need for veterinary services to come to these owners in the form of mobile clinics. Regardless of the type of low-cost or free community veterinary program created, it is imperative that it offers a positive experience for the pet owner. This involves attention to communication and cultural competence. Good communication between veterinarians and pet owners is critical and has been shown to lead to better clinical outcomes, higher client satisfaction, and increased compliance with recommended care. While traditionally veterinarian-client relationships were more paternalistic, a "relationship-centered" approach has more recently been promoted. This approach is one of balanced power between the client and veterinarian and is based on mutuality, negotiation and joint agreement

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