

Walk Through These Doors, Your Odds for Good Care Vanish

Watch out, they're popping up everywhere like mushrooms after a soaking rain. And the risk is all yours if you walk through their doors with your pet. Be forewarned, the horror stories are real. Your pet's well-being may be at stake.

Reviewed by [Dr. Becker](#)

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- There are many problems with the practice of conventional veterinary medicine, and now the profit potential has big corporations buying up individual vet practices at a rapid pace
- Corporate-owned veterinary clinics, sometimes referred to as “shoot and scoot” operations, rely on short appointment times, pet food sold in their lobbies and excessive pharmaceutical prescriptions to increase profits
- These chains are all about cookie-cutter treatment plans and leave little room for customized, innovative approaches; they also don't typically offer integrative therapies
- These vet practices also typically promote extensive vaccine protocols, and virtually ignore the potential for adverse vaccine reactions, especially in small pets
- Regardless of who your veterinarian is or their practice philosophy, to insure your pet gets the best health care, you must arm yourself with information and become a fearless advocate for your animal companion

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Conventional veterinarians are taught to follow the Western model of reactive medicine in which treating illness, rather than maintaining wellness is the goal. Following this model means that when disease inevitably strikes, drugs and/or surgery are often the only treatments available, and when those don't work, pet parents are left with no options.

“Preventive medicine” in conventional veterinary terms typically means lots of vaccinations and chemical pest preventives, which can and often do have serious side effects. The only nutrition advice many vets offer promotes low-quality processed pet food (which is frequently sold right out of their lobbies).

There's often no discussion with clients about the dangers of obesity in overweight pets, the need for daily exercise or mental stimulation, the hazards of environmental toxins or other lifestyle obstacles that can compromise your animal companion's quality of life and lifespan.

Big Corporations Are Snapping Up Veterinary Practices Left and Right

Sadly, it seems the problems with the practice of conventional veterinary medicine in this country are going from bad to worse.

Bloomberg Business published a very detailed and highly disturbing piece on the state of modern pet care, and specifically, the wave of corporatization that is consuming the industry.¹ The writer, Jason Clenfield, interviewed Dr. John Robb for the article:

“By 1985, when Robb finished veterinary school at the University of California at Davis, animal medicine was changing. More technology came into play as hospitals started selling their old MRI machines and CAT scanners to veterinary clinics. And, as human birthrates fell, pets took the place of children in some families.

In 2014 there were 179 million cats and dogs in the U.S., up from 98 million in 1980. Today, according to the American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA), more than 80% of pet owners think of themselves as their pets’ moms and dads.”

As the article points out, the way people feel about their pets these days and the money spent on them represents an irresistible opportunity for business entities such as Banfield Pet Hospital and VCA (Veterinary Centers of America), which are buying up individual vet practices all over the country.

Corporations now own up to 20% of the 26,000 pet hospitals in the U.S., and the buyouts continue at a rapid pace. Industry insiders predict individual ownership of veterinary hospitals will be a thing of the past in a generation or two.

Corporatized Veterinary Medicine Means Big Profit Potential with Minimal Government Oversight

Dr. Robb believes corporatized veterinary practices are committing peticide, which he describes as “The systematic destruction of pets by corporations for profit.” He believes Banfield drives vets to put profit ahead of the health and safety of pets, and many in the veterinary profession share his concerns.

In addition to the profit potential, unlike human medicine, veterinary medicine is largely unregulated, and pet owners pay cash, which means vets don’t have to justify their treatment plans to pet health insurers.

“What’s more,” writes Clenfield, “when veterinarians make fatal mistakes, they face no real financial consequences. The law hasn’t changed to reflect the attitudes of the average pet owner; courts still treat pets as property.

Damages paid to owners whose pets have been killed or injured are so low that a typical medical malpractice insurance policy for a veterinarian costs less than \$20 a month. Damages are so low, in fact, that few pet owners can find a lawyer willing to take even the most egregious case of veterinary malpractice.”

Banfield uses a proprietary software package called PetWare that steps veterinarians through the process of diagnosis and treatment. A manual comes with the software, and Clenfield provides a snapshot:

“In one example, explaining how the software is used to prescribe treatment, the book shows a checklist of therapies for a dog with atopic dermatitis, or itchy skin. Doctors are encouraged to recommend a biopsy, analgesics, topical medications, antibiotics, a therapeutic dietary supplement, an allergy diet, and a flea control package.

They're required to recommend antihistamines, shampoos, serum allergy testing, lab work, a skin diagnostic package, and anti-inflammatories. It's a treatment course that might run \$900 for symptoms that, in a best-case scenario, indicate something as prosaic as fleas."

When you consider how many dogs suffer with itchy skin, the profit potential in just this one scenario is mind-boggling. Additionally, while a cookie-cutter approach to medicine may work in some situations, it certainly isn't effective in every situation.

The art of medicine is the ability to use many different modalities to unlock the healing potential inside an animal's body. Limiting veterinarians' choices in how they practice medicine and reducing treatment options to a handful of allopathic medical options is detrimental to both the doctors stuck on this corporate hamster wheel and their voiceless patients.

Just One Example of Profits Over Pets — One-Size Vaccine Dosing

Clenfield's article also discusses the lack of science behind both the frequency and one-size-fits-all dosing of vaccines, and the reluctance of the veterinary profession to recognize the problems of over-vaccination and the potential for harm to smaller pets.

"An annual postcard reminding you that your dog or cat is due for its shots — 'it's time for the tough love' — is the main way veterinarians get pets in the door each year," writes Clenfield.

"That's why many animal doctors, at every kind of practice, have chosen to ignore guidelines from the AAHA, which since 2003 has recommended dogs not be given what are called the core vaccines — for distemper, parvovirus, and adenovirus — more often than every three years. Indeed, the guidelines say a single series of these shots is probably enough to provide a lifetime of immunity."

As for vaccine dosing:

"The standard for vaccine dosages has its own unscientific provenance," says Clenfield. "At some point in the 1960s, pharmaceutical companies simply settled on a round number that worked: 1 milliliter. Today, vaccines are the only pet medications that aren't scaled to body weight. Whether it's a 120-pound Great Dane or a 3-pound Chihuahua, one size fits all."

Advocates for one-size dosing argue that vaccines aren't intended to work in the body in the same way medications do, and therefore body weight isn't important. However, anecdotal evidence and scientific studies suggest otherwise. For example, a dozen years ago research was published in the Journal of the American Veterinary Association that involved, coincidentally, Banfield patients.

The researchers found that small breed dogs, especially young, neutered small dogs, were at the greatest risk of adverse reactions within three days of receiving a vaccine.² And the risk increased proportionate to a decrease in body weight. Dogs weighing 11 pounds or less were four times more likely than dogs over 99 pounds to suffer an adverse vaccine reaction. Medium sized dogs also had an increased risk over larger dogs.

However, for reasons only they can explain that seem primarily profit-motivated, conventional veterinarians and hospital chains like Banfield and VCA stick stubbornly to the notion that a 3-pound Yorkie can handle the same amount of vaccine as a 200-pound Mastiff. In fact, Dr. Robb actually lost his Banfield franchise and his livelihood when he was caught reducing vaccine doses for small dogs.

Under the circumstances, is it any wonder pet parents are looking for alternatives to traditional veterinary care?

Why You MUST BE Your Pet's Healthcare Advocate

Because of the problems with conventional veterinary medicine, it's always recommended to find a **holistic or integrative veterinarian** in your area to care for your pet. And certainly when deciding on veterinary care, make sure to look at a prospective vet's practice philosophy.

Ideally, his or her approach to keeping your pet healthy will mirror your own. There are traditionally oriented vets, holistically oriented vets and integrative vets who combine the best of both worlds of medicine in our care of animals. As a general rule, a conventional practitioner will focus on treating your pet when she's ill or injured, using drugs and/or surgery. A holistically trained vet will usually be more interested in promoting wellness and preventing illness.

Proactive, integrative vets bring the philosophies of both western and alternative medicine to the treatment of patients. Both approaches have practical application in the care of companion animals.

For example, Western medicine really shines for acute or trauma cases (about 15% of patients), and integrative medicine's strength is in lifestyle-related, chronic or degenerative cases (approximately 85% of the cases doctors see). Questions to ask a prospective veterinarian might include:

- What is her position on vaccinations? Does she **titer test** for immunity before vaccinating?
- How quick is he to dispense drugs like antibiotics and steroids to his patients?
- How often does she employ complementary methods of healing in her practice like herbs, nutritional supplements, chiropractic, **acupuncture**, homeopathy or physical/movement therapy?
- How does he feel about raw feeding, if that's how you feed your pet or plan to feed in the future? It's important that you and your vet have similar philosophies when it comes to nourishing your pet.

Unfortunately, the population of integrative vets is much smaller than the population of conventional practitioners. In addition, not every integrative vet is the perfect fit for every pet parent.

That's one of the biggest reasons to stay tuned to the Bark and Whiskers website — so you can become knowledgeable about the best way to care for your pet, and to arm you with the information you need to advocate for your animal companion, regardless of who your veterinarian is.

Sources and References

¹ [Bloomberg, January 10, 2017](#)

² [J Am Vet Med Assoc. 2005 Oct 1;227\(7\):1102-8](#)
