

WANTED: A FOREVER HOME



TUCKER is a 3-year-old miniature Schnauzer that weighs about 24 pounds. He is ready for adoption now that a previous allergy has been brought under control. This poor little boy was in such pitiful shape with hot spots all over his abdomen and legs that he was actually bleeding and very grumpy. Now that the allergy is being treated effectively his temperament is much improved! He is very loving with his foster mom and is now a happy, playful little boy. www.schnauzerrescueofthecarolinas.org



Are veterinarians 'real' doctors?

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Recently I was at a dinner party where one of the other guests, a non-practicing medical doctor, made the comment to me that he does not feel that veterinarians are "real doctors."

I have heard this comment quite a few times over the many years I have worked in the field of veterinary medicine. I replied, "Why is it you think this?" His response was, "Well, you work on animals not people," which I felt certain would be his answer.

I smiled and laughed and responded that must make his job easier than mine. He got a

great belly laugh out of my reply and asked me in return why I felt this and I said, "You usually have the ability to speak to and receive a response from your patients and you only have to deal with one species — human. Veterinarians must become familiar with species from A-Z and relate all of that back to the human body (given that we are humans and know our bodies the best) and we must do this while using great intuition, read body language, gather thorough histories and perform thorough physical exams and all because our patients cannot speak our language and nor can we speak their language and many times owners will have brought their beloved pet in because it just is not acting right and have no specific reason. And reading subtle signs can mean the difference between life and death for pet.

Veterinary schools in this country are extremely limited in number and only allow for about 72 applicants to receive a slot per class, as opposed to medical schools that are in abundance.

We are at times labeled "not real doctors," though we work long hours to keep pets healthy. We do this with caring and, hopefully, grace.

We face dangerous situations every day, from our patients as well as some of our clients who have mental illness. Our patients can also carry Zoonotic diseases that humans can catch

from animals. We are bitten, scratched, kicked, bled upon, pooped on, urinated on and even have masses, cysts and abscesses rupture on us.

Veterinary general practitioners have to wear many "hats" and some of us have special interests and equipment that create more hats for us to wear.

General practitioners server their clients and patients in many, many capacities: behaviorist, counselor/psychologist, ultrasonographer, radiologist, groomer, infectious disease expert, parasitologist, gerontologist, dermatologist, allergist, chiropractor, massage therapist, acupuncturist, physical rehabber, phlebotomist, pathologist, nutritionist, theriogenologist, oncologist, ophthalmologist, proctologist, urologist, cardiologist, pharmacist, dentist, podiatrist, internal medicine/diagnostician, toxicologist, anesthesiologist and last, but by far not least, surgeon.

In veterinary medicine, as in human medicine, there are board-certified specialists in each of these fields, but general practitioners are expected to handle cases coming in the door that cover all these areas.

I do not know of any human general practitioner in modern day that does even a fraction of these duties and certainly not handle having to "change gears" from one room to the next where there is a dog in one room and a cat in the next, to a ferret, then beloved rat, then a bird and a snake. Yes, we veterinarians who enjoy seeing and treating exotics will have days that start just like this and continue for a full 12 hours.

I know veterinarians who have saved human lives in war in the Middle East and other relatively recent wars when no medical doctor was within a 100 miles to help. Veterinarians are real doctors and in fact we do earn a doctorate in veterinary medicine.

As Will Rogers said, "The best doctor in the world is a veterinarian. He can't ask his patients what is the matter — He's got to just know."

Q&A

Cat spraying not a litter-box problem

Question: Our cat has suddenly started spraying urine on the furniture. We've squirted him, spanked him and yelled at him, but it doesn't help. He's still using the litter box, just not all the time. My husband says if it doesn't stop, the cat goes out. Can you help?

Answer: The application of urine to mark territory is different from the release of urine to eliminate waste from the body. The strategies for addressing spraying are different from those that you use in getting a cat to use a litter box.

That said, the first step is exactly the same: Take your cat in to see his veterinarian to make sure there isn't a health issue triggering this change in behavior. Your veterinarian's office is the place to start with behavior problems of any kind, especially when they come on suddenly in previously well-mannered pets.

Although both male and female cats may spray, unneutered males are the biggest offenders. Neutering takes care of the problem in the majority of cases if done before sexual maturity is attained. While neutering isn't quite as effective on adult cats, it's worthwhile to alter older spraying cats.

For those cats who don't respond to neutering, environmental stresses — such as a new person or pet in the house or a neighbor's cat in the yard — may be triggering the spraying. Anti-anxiety medication may help (talk to your veterinarian), as can cleaning sprayed areas thoroughly and covering them with foil to discourage fresh marking. The pheromone-based aerosol products made by Feliway may also help calm your cat and reduce the urge to spray.

Don't punish your cat for spraying, even if you catch him in the act. Doing so makes him even more anxious and more likely to mark. Punishment is never a good strategy when trying to solve behavior problems in cats.

~ Gina Spadafori

Do you have a pet question? Send it to petconnections@gmail.com.

