Upholding their Oath: Veterinarians Balance Purpose with Practicality

New survey from Pro Plan Veterinary Diets highlights highs and lows of veterinary practitioners today

ST. LOUIS, April 25, 2024 /PRNewswire/ -- From the childhood dream of becoming a veterinarian and saving the lives of pets, to today's realities of practicing veterinary medicine, the deep commitment veterinarians feel for their calling remains unchanged. However, certain factors make that commitment increasingly difficult. Long hours, understaffing, student debt and fatigue can all take their toll – but nothing more so than clients who can't afford appropriate veterinary care, according to a survey conducted by Purina Pro Plan Veterinary Diets ahead of World Veterinary Day, which is celebrated the last Saturday of April.

Survey shows altruism at odds with financial realities

In the survey*, nearly 6 in 10 practitioners (57%) said their desire to become veterinarians began in elementary school or earlier, fueled by a shared aspiration to make pets' lives better. And this unwavering commitment remains unchanged years later, with nearly 9 in 10 veterinarians surveyed (87%) continuing to choose saving and improving the lives of pets as a fulfilling attribute of being a veterinarian, along with improving the lives of pet owners (60%) and contributing to society/playing an important role in the community (53%).

These findings are at odds, however, with the realities of veterinary care: more than 80 percent of participating veterinarians said they encounter clients who are unable to pay for treatment of a pet's life-threatening health issue at least once a month, and more than one-third (37%) said they are faced with such situations once a week or more. In addition, an overwhelming majority indicated that having clients who cannot afford appropriate veterinary care is one of the challenges they currently experience as a veterinarian, with 95% citing it as a major or minor difficulty**.**

"These results reflect the sense of disillusionment we know is felt by so many practitioners in the veterinary profession today," said Callie Harris, DVM, Senior Veterinary Communications Manager for Purina Pro Plan Veterinary Diets. "Veterinarians enter the profession because of our call to care for pets, but economic realities frequently force us to make painful choices about the care we can provide to certain patients."

According to the survey, nearly all veterinarians (95%) have encountered a situation where a client made the decision to euthanize a pet because the client was unable to pay for a life-saving medical treatment, while more than three-quarters (78%) of those surveyed indicated their typical solution in cases where clients can't pay is to significantly limit the care they provide. Meanwhile, just under one in four (23%) said their practices provide the needed care and absorb the cost.

All such solutions require sacrifice on the part of veterinarians, whether the cost is emotional, financial or professional, noted Dr. Harris. She added that the inability to treat pets whose cash-strapped owners can't pay for services like emergency and after-hours care, as well as conditions such as cancer, leads almost half (45%) of surveyed practitioners to feel they are not fully upholding the oath they took to care for animals if they don't treat the animals.

Pro Plan Veterinary Support Mission provides relief through REACH, Paisley Paws

Early in 2024, Pro Plan Veterinary Diets announced the creation of the Pro Plan Veterinary Support Mission to help remove barriers veterinarians face in practice. The brand has donated $1.2 million to date to the American Veterinary Medical Foundation REACH (Reaching Every Animal with Charitable Healthcare) Program, which provides grants for veterinarians who have clients experiencing financial difficulties. The program, available to all AVMA members, provides financial grants of up to $2,000 per calendar year for each veterinarian in a practice to reimburse the cost for owners unable to pay for care.

"It's been my experience that when pet owners who are experiencing financial hardship can be helped when a pet-care crisis occurs, the chances that they will continue to return to the practice for routine veterinary care often improve," said veterinarian Christina Frick, DVM, of Frick Veterinary Services in Larned, Kansas. "The REACH Program has been wonderful for my clinic."

To expand the impact of its Mission, the brand is also donating $100,000 to the charitable veterinary foundation Paisley Paws, which provides grants directly to partnered clinics to assist with treatment or specialty care for families experiencing hardship and are unable to afford the cost of life-saving veterinary care for their pets.

"If you ask any member of a veterinary team why they started in this industry, they will tell you it's for their love of animals, but you quickly realize, you are taking care of the people, just as much as you are the animals. There is nothing more heartbreaking than having an animal come in need of life-saving care and having to explain to the family their beloved pet will not survive without the emergency services they need but cannot afford. Paisley Paws Foundation has changed the way we function as a hospital, allowing us to focus more on saving patients, and less on finances," said Kerry Wagoner, CVT – Hospital Director of FloridaWild Integrative Veterinary Center & Urgent Care. "We will forever be thankful that they are now a part of our team."

Veterinarians can visit www.ProPlanVetSupport.com to learn more about the Pro Plan Veterinary Support Mission and to see if they qualify for a grant under the AVMF REACH Program.

**Data was collected by Relevation Research via an online survey from March 5-12, 2024. A total of 301 U.S. companion animal and mixed animal veterinarians working 20 or more hours per week qualified and completed the survey.*

About Purina Pro Plan Veterinary Diets and Supplements

Purina Pro Plan Veterinary Diets and Supplements are manufactured or distributed by Nestlé Purina PetCare, a global leader in the pet care industry. Nestlé Purina PetCare creates richer lives for pets and the people who love them. Founded in 1894, Purina has helped dogs and cats live longer, healthier lives by offering scientifically based nutritional innovations. Purina manufactures some of the world's most trusted and popular pet care products, including Pro Plan, Purina ONE, Fancy Feast and Tidy Cats. Our more than 10,000 U.S. associates take pride in our trusted pet food, treat and litter brands that feed 46 million dogs and 68 million cats every year. More than 500 Purina scientists, veterinarians, and pet care experts ensure our commitment to unsurpassed quality and nutrition.

About the American Veterinary Medical Foundation

The American Veterinary Medical Foundation (AVMF) is the charitable arm of the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), one of the oldest and largest veterinary medical organizations in the world. For 60 years, the AVMF has been dedicated to developing resources to advance the science and practice of veterinary medicine to improve animal and human health. Foundation programs and activities are designed to benefit veterinary medicine, promote animal welfare, and enhance research so that the profession is better prepared to deal with difficult problems facing animal health today and tomorrow. Charitable contributions and support to the Foundation assist veterinarians and the entire veterinary healthcare team with helping animals. Our funding priorities include Education/Scholarship, Disaster Relief, Charitable Veterinary Care and Animal Health Research.

About Paisley Paws

Paisley Paws Charitable Veterinary Foundation's mission is to enhance the well-being of pets and veterinary professionals in need of life-saving, life-enhancing hardship support. Paisley Paws supports three program pillars: Life-Saving, Life-Enhancing Treatments - designed to provide financial support directly to PAWrtner clinics during times of medical crises for pet owners who are experiencing hardship and financially unable to afford life-saving, life-enhancing veterinary care. Scholarship grants to Offset Educational Debt - provides scholarship grants to senior-level veterinary students. Betterment of Mental Health - provides financial relief to veterinary professionals suffering from mental distress, and are experiencing a mental health crisis and where medical leave is necessary to enhance mental and emotional well-being to prevent suicide. Paisley Paws is currently PAWrtnering with 148 PAWrtner Clinics in 29 states. Charitable contributions and support to Paisley Paws significantly reduce hardship euthanasia, veterinary student debt and suicide within the profession.

SOURCE Purina Pro Plan Veterinary Diets

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