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Why Your Veterinarian Cannot Afford to Always Tell You the Truth...

Most dog owners look to their veterinarian for advice in regards to their dog's health. They believe that their vet, naturally, is there to help them keep their dog healthy. Only few are aware that they might have greater chances of getting honest answers if asking a car dealer about the qualities of his competitors' cars....

Veterinarians need to make a living, and they are very tightly controlled by their trade unions, the veterinary associations. And they have no mandate whatsoever to look after the public interest, much less your dog's health.

How veterinarians become owners of animal hospitals

In order to run an animal hospital or clinic for treatment of sick pets, you need a license to practice veterinarian medicine. Licenses like those are generally issued by a politically controlled/elected government. In most European countries, this is also the case for veterinarians. In North America, however, it isn't. Both Canada and the USA have delegated the authority to determine whether or not a specific veterinarian should be allowed to practice. And they delegated that authority to *the trade union* for that profession - the Veterinary Associations!

Unfortunately for the public interest, those Veterinary Associations have no accountability to the public, and they have no obligations, no mandate, no ethical requirements put on them to make sure that they manage their members and their affairs in a way that also takes the interest of pet owners or the general public into account. On the contrary, they are freely allowed to "self-govern", which means that they can do what they please, in regards to what they see their purpose: to secure the maximum income for its members, just as any other trade union would do.

It is thus a very natural thing for this trade union to do what all trade unions want to do: Make the income from their trade *exclusive* for their members... In other words: "If you are not a member of the union here, you are fired!"

For a practicing veterinarian, this means that his license to practice is subject to his membership in the association being "in good standing"... Non-members simply don't get a license to practice until they pay their membership fees and submit to the ruling of the association....

Conflict of interest....

There is nothing wrong in making money by providing a professional service. Many experts do this: architects, lawyers, doctors, dentists, engineers, accountants, etc. However, in the case of veterinarians, there are some huge conflicts of interest embedded in this...

Could you imagine what would happen if the Association of Accountants was responsible for collecting our taxes? Or what about the Bar Association being in charge of the Police? And what if you could only get a driver's license if you were a member of American Automobile Association?

Yes - it is absurd - and has no way of leading to anything that even smells like protection of the individual's rights or the public's best interest!

There are tons of examples of unions arranging devastating strikes that hold the public hostage for what they claim is a reasonable financial demand from their side. Bus strikes. Postal strikes. Teachers' strikes. You name the examples! Don't fool yourself into believing that those trade unions care much about *you* - unless you are a paying member!

The veterinary associations are no different. We shall have a closer look at what the consequences of that might be...

How veterinarians make a living

Face it: **veterinarians do not make much money on you if your dog is perfectly healthy!**

Unless they can make you accept paying for *preventive services*, such as vaccinations. Granted, a vet can also make money by selling dog food - and by selling all kinds of other products, like flea prevention, heart worm prevention, etc. The sales reps from the big companies will be more than happy about educating your vet on how to do that!

This is one of the associations' primary activities: providing information for their members about why their clients should buy into all this prevention... What better ways can they find to support their members' business?

But here is the catch: What if this prevention is not warranted in *your* area?

Heartworm is a classic example. There are many areas in North America where it is well known that heartworm is unable to live. Many states and provinces simply don't have any! Nevertheless, veterinarians in those areas still promote it by scaring their clients into believing that heartworm is a major threat to their dogs...

Vaccination, the same thing: there is a ton of proof that yearly re-vaccinations are not only redundant, but actually outright harmful to our dogs. Yet, the

associations still put pressure on their members for promoting the necessity of yearly re-vaccinations! Even the US government can see the absurdity in this and asked the American Veterinary Association to revise their policy on this. But the association refused! It gave only one explanation: it would cost their members too much lost revenue... This was in April 2003. It is still "business as usual"...

Another example is Lyme Disease. It is transferred to dogs via a certain species of tick. Veterinary associations in Western Canada have been publishing big ads, warning people about Lyme disease by referring to the fact that those ticks have been identified in local parks where people walk their dogs. But no word about the fact that not a single one of those ticks in the entire province has ever been seen to actually *carry* the disease - the closest case known was half a continent away...

And why does your veterinarian always want to sell you Hill's Science Diet?

Well, you should know that the associations, in general, have a vested financial interest in many of the products a veterinarian can sell to clients (Veterinary Associations are major shareholders in Hill's Science diet...), and they are paid by the manufacturer for promoting those products... (In fact, the manufacturers often have to bribe those associations to accept at least condoning their product, as the associations have the power to ban their members from using them! There are many examples of this happening, both in North America and Europe.)

The pet food manufacturers and the pharmaceutical companies also run "incentive programs" for practicing veterinarians. Those programs are basically giving the vet a nice commission of all sales, but in addition to a plain commission, the vet gets some significant cash bonuses when his/her sales reach certain numbers! This is of course, an excellent incentive for the vet to sell more of that product - whether or not the clients actually need it...

How veterinarians can protect their income

Now, what if some of this preventative medication, like heartworm control, vaccination, artificial pet food, etc. had some long-term side effect that would be harmful for your dog?

Well, the truth is that your vet would make even more money on that - first, on selling the drugs, next on treating your dog for the side effects... Besides, he could not be blamed for unethical practice, because he was following the general advice of his trade union, which is the ultimate authority in the area!

Remember, a trade union has really only one purpose: to secure the financial interest of the majority of its members. It has no agenda for serving the public - and the public has no way of influencing the way it is managed. Veterinary Associations are no exception.

The sad but inevitable conclusion from this is that all vets make more money if people are scared to use preventive medication, also where there really is little or no justification for it...

You need to be outright naïve if you believe that the veterinary associations are not fully aware of this! They are most definitely also aware that their power is dependent on their members' ability to make money, so they have a vested interest in "protecting" their members from the truth being told whenever this truth could cause a reduction in some vets' income....

Why don't we have any whistleblowers?

So, what if your vet realized this fraud and wants to do the best for you and your dog, refusing to make money on the obvious business opportunity he denies by telling you the truth? Do you think the veterinary association would welcome that? Would you think they would silently accept that the spreading of this information would cause a huge decline in their members' income? Or would you think that the association would do what is in its powers to prevent that from happening? Maybe you would think it might be possible that this association would do something to protect their other members from losing money on this truth being spread too far?

Well, again, I do not want to insult your intelligence. "Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely". When a trade union as these veterinary associations do indeed have the power they need and want to shut their members up, you can bet your bottom dollar that it happens.

And they do have that power. They can set their own rules, write their own codes of ethics, set their own disciplinary rules, decide on appropriate punishment for members who deviate from those rules, and enforce it all by ultimately pulling a member's license to practice! All completely without being held accountable by government or anyone else – except for the General Meetings of their own members. And those members all have a similar interest in protecting their income – as the association so obviously tried to do! So, they have nothing to fear...

I have proof of this happening in several cases where veterinarians spoke their honest mind in a way that would make some members of the public question the policies of the association and its generally recommended practices for its members. It is simple. The association just makes the member pay a huge fine for his "deviation" from the accepted policies and the association's dubious codes of ethics.... If the member does not pay the fines, his license to practice veterinary medicine is revoked. That's it. And he is stripped of his livelihood – with no way of appealing the decisions – or to find another job!

Do you think he will pay the fines? Do you think he will continue practicing his rights of "free speech"? What about his family? What about his mortgage? His kids?

This basically means that a veterinarian in North America cannot freely speak his mind. If he says something in public that does not please his trade union, this

association can revoke his rights to make a living by pulling his license to practice! And there are numerous examples of it happening...

How you stay in charge...

Despite all this, I still believe there are some honest vets around who have strong enough ethics to maintain a desire to do the best they can for your dog, also long-term.

The problem is that they are being brainwashed every day with distorted information they hear again and again - and, human nature has it, when you hear a lie often enough, you start to believe in it. And when that happens, you do not even know why! You stop thinking about it - and you just take the action you have been programmed to take!

And, just to nail the point home: if a vet does not like this, but wants to object to it and call the bluff, he will very quickly be in a situation of having no license to practice. He will then have to sue his association for wrongful cancellation of his membership, and the chances of winning that case 2-3 years later, when he has no income in all that time and cannot afford a lawyer, are slim indeed...

Veterinary associations have the same power over veterinarians as the communist party had over Russians in the times of the Soviet Union.

I guess you can see now why you have very good reasons to question what your veterinarian tells you is "the right thing to do" for your dog. And that is exactly what I encourage you to do: ASK QUESTIONS! Don't take anything for granted that does not make sense to you. Get all the information you need before you make your decision, and do not be shy of taking charge.

After all, it is *your* money - and *your* dog. And *your* responsibility....

Mogens Eliassen

Mogens Eliassen holds a mag. scient. degree (comparable to a US Ph. D.) in Chemistry from Århus University, Denmark and has 30+ years of experience working with dogs, dog owners, dog trainers, and holistic veterinarians as a coach, lecturer, and education system developer. He is the author of several unique books about dogs and responsible care of dogs, available from www.k9joy.com. He publishes a newsletter "[The Peeing Post](#)" containing lots of tips and advice on dog problems of all kinds, particularly about training, behavioral problems, feeding, and health care.

For more information about Mogens Eliassen, including links to other articles he has published, please send a short e-mail to contact@k9joy.com.