

Client Economic Limitations & Veterinary Burnout

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In the Literature

Kipperman BS, Kass PH, Rishniw M. Factors that influence small animal veterinarians' opinions and actions regarding cost of care and effects of economic limitations on patient care and outcome and professional career satisfaction and burnout. *J Am Vet Med Assoc.* 2017;250(7):785-794.

FROM THE PAGE ...

Veterinary burnout and depression have become common discussion topics over the past few years. A 2015 US study suggested that one in 10 veterinarians has suffered from severe psychological distress and that approximately one in 6 has considered suicide.¹ Even students are at risk; 2 studies have demonstrated that veterinary students suffer from higher levels of stress and depression than other professional students.^{2,3} This may be a result of working in a high-stress profession, long hours, and/or high debt loads.

This study examined clinicians' perceptions about the cost of care and owner economic limitations and how these might affect their level of satisfaction or burnout. Most clinicians felt that owners' economic limitations adversely affected their ability to provide the desired care and was among many factors contributing to job dissatisfaction and feelings of burnout. Not surprisingly, financial discussions with owners are a major stressor for many clinicians and rarely occur in advance of future visits or potential illness or disease.

Interestingly, although clinicians felt that owner adoption of pet insurance would be beneficial in reducing economic limitations, most did not routinely discuss this option. Most thought that educating pet owners about the cost of pet care should be the responsibility of outside professional and educational organizations.

... TO YOUR PATIENTS

Key pearls to put into practice:

- 1** It is important to educate pet owners about appropriate pet care costs without overemphasizing finances over quality medical care.
- 2** Increased awareness of pet health insurance availability by pet owners might lessen the impact of cost sensitivity experienced by many clinicians.
- 3** Financial assistance programs can improve care options.

References

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2. Killinger SL, Flanagan S, Castine E, Howard KA. Stress and depression among veterinary medical students. *J Vet Med Educ.* 2017;44(1):3-8.
3. Bakker DJ, Lyons ST, Conlon PD. An exploration of the relationship between psychological capital and depression among first-year doctor of veterinary medicine students. *J Vet Med Educ.* 2017;44(1):50-62.

Suggested Reading

- Moore IC, Coe JB, Adams CL, Conlon PD, Sargent JM. The role of veterinary team effectiveness in job satisfaction and burnout in companion animal veterinary medicine. *J Am Vet Med Assoc.* 2014; 245(5):513-524.
- DVM 360. When clients see the health benefits of pet ownership, pets and vets win. *DVM 360.* <http://veterinarynews.dvm360/when-clients-see-health-benefits-pet-ownership-and-vets-win>. Published September 20, 2016. Accessed July 11, 2017.