



Facts About the Cost of Veterinary Care

A recent article in *Consumer Reports* highlighted a number of tips to assist consumers with purchasing veterinary services. While the article provided many helpful suggestions, it failed to stress several important factors to keep in mind when considering veterinary care expenses. The following information is provided to assist you in better understanding issues related to the cost of veterinary care.

Advances in care

There has never been a better time to be a pet. Thanks to advances in veterinary medicine, pets are living longer and are healthier than ever before.

Today, there are a number of diagnostic tools available to assist the veterinarian in arriving at an accurate diagnosis and to monitor a pet's response to a course of treatment. While the expense of these tools—such as laboratory tests, blood panels, x-rays and ultrasounds—may initially sound expensive, in the long term they help consumers to save on their veterinary bills. By arriving at a quick and accurate diagnosis, your veterinarian can determine an appropriate treatment course sooner, which improves your pet's outlook and can save you money. Many of these diagnostic tools are considered an essential element of wellness exams, and thus assist your veterinarian in detecting diseases in their early stages.

Likewise, there are many advanced procedures, treatments and medications available today that did not exist just a few years ago. Since pets nowadays are considered family members to most pet owners, it's the veterinarian's job to present the best possible treatment option to pet owners. If cost is a concern, you can discuss with your veterinarian other treatment options available. If you have questions or concerns regarding the cost of veterinary services or products, please discuss these with your veterinary health care team.

Keep in mind that veterinarians take an oath to preserve and protect the long-term health of their patients. This principle guides your veterinarian's health care recommendations.

Cost of business

As you can imagine, there are many business expenses related to running a modern veterinary hospital. Included within your veterinary bill are the costs of maintaining suitable facilities, equipment and support personnel. To deliver the best care possible, veterinarians and their staffs are dedicated to continual improvement and education to stay abreast of the latest research.

Additionally, as in human healthcare, inflation has had a major impact on veterinary practices. The veterinary hospital's expenses to provide services have increased about twice as fast as the revenue collected through offering services to pet owners.

Selecting a hospital

There are several factors contributing to a high-quality veterinary hospital. While cost is always an important consideration, one cannot compare services based on price alone. Animal health care is not a commodity. Just as most individuals would not select human medical services based solely on price, the same principle applies to the selection of veterinary services.

Factors to look for when selecting a veterinary hospital include:

- the breadth of services offered
- the experience and training of the veterinarians and staff
- the quality and appearance of the facilities
- the availability of state-of-the-art equipment
- the communications skills of the medical staff

To provide guidance to veterinary hospitals on the best care possible, AAHA offers a voluntary accreditation program. Participating hospitals are evaluated regularly and are in accordance with over 800 standards. These standards cover areas including the thoroughness of medical records, anesthesiology procedures, assessment and treatment of pain in animals, surgery and nursing care.

Vaccinations

In recent years, the veterinary community has gained a better understanding of vaccinations, their length of protection, and their possible side effects. Consequently, AAHA and other veterinary associations have issued new vaccine guidelines for the industry.

Vaccines are a medical issue—that should be discussed with your veterinarian. Consult with your veterinarian on a vaccination program that is best for your pet based on its age, health status, lifestyle, environment, travel habits and exposure to disease.

<p>Remember, the best source for information about veterinary care is your veterinary practice. If you ever have questions regarding veterinary services or products, make sure to address these questions with the doctor or staff at your hospital.</p>
