10-1-1983

Pediatricians for Animals: That Important First Visit

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PEDiatricians for Animals
An educated owner is a better owner, he will be able to spot a problem sooner and this may enable the veterinarian to prevent an illness from becoming a major one.

The patients coming to the clinic are usually six weeks or older. "Economically, it is often not feasible to treat a one- or two-week-old puppy or kitten," he said. "Also, the mortality rate in an average purebred litter is about twenty percent. This is due not so much to disease but to inborn defects."

The puppies and kittens seen at the clinic range from animals brought in for vaccinations and a check-up to animals with severe disorders, referred by practitioners. In the latter cases the clinic often draws upon the other specialties at VHUP in an effort to help the patient.

Dr. Jezyk pointed out the importance of check-ups at a later age. "People wouldn't dream of not taking their children to the pediatrician annually," he said. "Yet they assume that a young puppy or kitten, after having received the last permanent vaccination at twelve to sixteen weeks of age, doesn't need to see the veterinarian again until it is time for booster shots a year later."

Much can happen during this time. He explained that many disorders do not manifest themselves until an animal is over six months of age. "We used to see the young animals at about that age for the rabies inoculation," he said. "We then could give it a physical exam and detect any abnormalities. Now, with an increase in rabies in the wildlife population, this vaccination is given earlier and many people won't bring a puppy or kitten back at six or seven months of age just for a check-up."

Another aspect of pediatrics is nutrition. "We have seen some rather bizarre diets recommended for puppies and kittens by well-meaning breeders," Dr. Jezyk said. "Some involve three or four different foods given at various times of the day. Often these are expensive, complicated to prepare, and of little value to the growing animal." He recommends to owners that puppies and kittens are fed a good commercial feed, tailored to the need of growing puppies and kittens. He also is not in favor of supplementing the daily ration with vitamins and calcium. "We don't often see problems due to the lack of calcium or vitamins," he said. "Rather, we frequently see animals with problems due to oversupplementation of these substances."

The Pediatrics Clinic at the School is an important resource. It provides practitioners with a clinic for referrals of difficult and unusual problems in young animals. It is also a place where students learn to treat a healthy young cat or dog, a population which will be a major part of their practice. The clinic is, as Dr. Jezyk put it, a clinic for "small animal herd health," an aspect of veterinary medicine very important to the well being of the puppies and kittens which become part of countless families each year.

The Pediatrics Clinic sees patients Mondays and Tuesdays, appointments can be made by calling (215) 898-4680.