

Veterinarians are blessed with a career that is both challenging and heartwarming, intellectual and pragmatic, and demanding and rewarding all at the same time. When asked to describe what I do, most people have little trouble understanding the big picture of the job, but most haven't the slightest idea of the details. I don't presume all will care much, but for those that might wonder, I've put together a brief primer of veterinary medicine. I call it the ABC's of being an animal doctor.

(Alternative intro)

I got my first job in a veterinary hospital when I was 18 years old. I would come home from college on Saturday mornings to clean cages and runs and mop the floors for our town's only veterinary hospital. This was before animal hospitals were regularly open on Saturdays. My boss, Dr. Johnson, was kind enough to occasionally schedule a procedure for a Saturday morning so I could watch. I loved it. With few (if any) exceptions, this kind of job is how veterinarians start their careers. For those of you out there contemplating a veterinary career, or if you're just curious what goes on in "the back" I've put together a primer call the ABC's of Veterinary Medicine.

(Alternative intro)

The Veterinary profession is blessed with (and hopefully deserving of) a very good public image. Nowhere is this more evident than in the many young people that express interest in becoming veterinarians someday. These young people are often more than willing to give up their free time to come in and just observe the daily routines of a busy veterinary hospital. All the sounds and smells, hustle and bustle, and victories and losses of animal medicine are there to be experienced by these young professionals-to-be. For those who are interested but can't afford the time to shadow a veterinarian for a day, I thought you might benefit from an easier, albeit less hands on, introduction to the World of Veterinary Medicine. This would be The Veterinarian's ABC's. T

(Alternative intro)

What follows is a light hearted guide to the world of Veterinary Medicine. Some might call it our profession's ABC's

**A** is for *Allergy*

Whether it's to fleas, pollen or food, there's no doubt that allergies in pets will keep veterinarians searching for solutions for years to come.

**B** if for *Bad breath*

With rare exception, an indication of dental disease and the number one reason people hesitate to get up close and personal with their pet.

**C** is for *Cancer*

A diagnosis we least like to make, but a problem we most like to solve.

**D** is for ***Diarrhea***

You don't do what I do for long without gaining a new appreciation for this word. A common symptom of many possible illnesses-and though often asked to, the hardest to solve over a phone consultation.

**E** is for ***Emergency***

A surefire cure for boredom (like work in a veterinary hospital is ever boring)

**F** is for ***Foxtails***

Those little wild grass seedpods that possess mystical abilities to get into the most remote areas of a pet's body.

**G** is for ***Goop (or Gunk)***

The highly technical term used to describe any semi-liquid material found on a pet that is thick, smelly, oozing or draining-and asking to be cleaned up.

**H:** is for ***Hair***

It's everywhere, and frankly it's overrated!

**I:** is for ***Injection***

"Whoa Doc, is that a needle? ya know 'Jake' don't like needles."

**J:** is for ***Jumping up***

Quite possibly one of the most basic indicators of pet health. When "Spot" can't jump onto the bed, couch, chair, lap, truck-bed, or the kids, something is definitely wrong with "Spot".

**K:** is for ***Kidney disease***

Why do we see so much kidney disease in cats? No one knows for sure, but some have suggested that Mother Nature forgot to design the feline kidneys to last as long as the rest of the cat.

**L:** is for ***Listening***

A clinician's critical diagnostic skill that goes way beyond hearing.

**M:** is for ***Muzzle***

Voted by veterinary staff as the most valuable tool for retaining ones fingers.

**N:** is for ***Non-compliant***

The politically correct term for the pet owner that takes time off work, catches the dog, loads him in the car, spends some discretionary income to have him checked over by the doctor, then doesn't follow care instructions.

**O:** is for ***Obesity***

A condition affecting an estimated 60 percent (or more) of domestic dogs.

- P: is for ***Personally***  
How most veterinarians take a medical case that doesn't go well.
- Q: is for ***Quiet***  
Hmm...don't know what that is.
- R: is for ***Reunion***  
That ecstatically happy moment when pet and pet-owner are reunited. Witnessing this is one of the true joys of veterinary practice.
- S: is for ***Staff***  
Their contribution to a well-run veterinary office is immeasurable.
- T: is for ***Teeth***  
That ever-present reminder that not ***all*** pets are happy to see us.
- U: is for ***Ultrasound***  
An amazing diagnostic tool that has forever changed the practice of veterinary medicine.
- V: is for ***Vomiting***  
A call to action to take your dog to the Veterinarian.
- W: is for ***Wait***  
A four letter word no one cares for. This happens because the practice of good medicine doesn't always fit into a tidy schedule of appointments. We keep trying though.
- X: is for ***X-ray***  
The diagnostic technique that is considerably more difficult to perform in animals than people-but often cheaper.
- Y** is for ***Yeast ear infections***  
By a long shot, the single most common cause of ear problems in dogs. As usual, over-the-counter products don't help.
- Z** is for ***ZZZ...***  
The sound a veterinarian makes after a long day at the office. (Did you really think I was going to say Zebra?)

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