

The Rising Cost of Shelter Medical Care

There are two “schools of thought” or approaches to veterinary care among today’s animal welfare organizations (“AWO”s). The first is the practice of preventative care and treatment for the group; the second is the practice of individual treatment based on the needs of each animal. I first wrote about this topic in a 2001 issue of Protecting Animals magazine. Going back through the article recently, I was struck by how many of the issues discussed there are still relevant.

The basis of the group or “herd” protocol is to select treatments (both preventative and medical) that will directly affect the whole group of animals. This method of care was naturally championed by large AWO’s in response to high volume intakes; by ensuring each individual is vaccinated and medicated for flea/tick on intake, there is better control over the health of the herd.

The second, more individual approach to shelter medical care was popularized by AWOs with the resources to treat a variety of injuries and illnesses. The cost of individual care through this type of program can run into the thousands. In fact, Washington Animal Rescue League spent an average \$800 per animal last year. When asked if the organization would be able to sustain this model long term, Mary Jarvis, Interim CEO and Director of Operations, replied: *“Every time I have to look at this number I say Ouch!”*

The amount of money spent in an animal welfare organization on surgery, medical treatment, and preventative care is exceeded only by staffing costs. As these medical costs climb, many organizations struggle to contain their veterinary expenses by entering into buyers’ agreements and developing high volume surgery programs to drive down the cost of these procedures.

Furthermore, as public expectations continue to climb in relation to what AWO’s are responsible for when adopting pets to families, AWOs are increasingly adopting the current retail model of “refunds and returns” which has shaped the expectations of consumers and therefore many adopters. People expect to get a healthy animal and if they don’t, they expect the shelter to make it right, specifically by paying for expensive post-adoption medical care. As a result, more and more organizations are struggling with the financial costs of providing the care the public expects for animals in shelters.

Pethealth can help your organization reduce the cost of preventative treatment for animals in your care *and* mitigate potential post-adoption costs for your new pet adopters in the face of unexpected accidents or illnesses, preventing these costs from falling back on your organization.

The complimentary ShelterCare Gift of Insurance provided for your adopted cats and dogs can go a long way toward protecting your organization from post-adoption health complaints and shifts the cost of post-adoption treatments from your organization to our insurance underwriters; most organizations could better protect themselves through higher gift activation rates by messaging the ShelterCare Gift more effectively. If you would like to know your activation rate, your Regional Director, Shelter Outreach can share it with you, as well as provide training for your staff to message the importance of the ShelterCare Gift to your adopters.

Pethealth also helps AWOs save money by harnessing the buying power of the 2,000 organizations that we do business with to help lower the cost of your medical supplies. Through our exclusive relationship with Velcera, makers of generic flea/tick and heartworm treatments PetArmor and PetTrust Plus, we are able to bring you savings **no other company can provide** on these necessary preventative products.

Having affordable flea/tick protection and heartworm preventative and treatment available for your animals and new pet adopters is both important to the success of your adoptions and your bottom line.

Messaging the ShelterCare Gift of Insurance and taking advantage of these exclusive relationships will lower your costs, both before and after adoptions, in the face of rising expenses for medical care to shelter animals.

Did you know? You can get 25 FREE microchips when you buy ONE case of PetArmor flea and tick prevention medication. That's over \$145 in savings! Each case of PetArmor contains 56 doses of the same active ingredients in the exact same concentration as the leading veterinarian-recommended preventative and treatment.

Sincerely,

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