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How to Choose Your Veterinarian

It should be no surprise that not all veterinarians are created equally (nor physicians, dentists, or mechanics for that matter). While all veterinarians should theoretically know more about medicine & surgery than someone who is not in the profession, is that really enough? Nobody should set out to find an “average” or “decent” physician for their child’s health (or their own health either). So, why would you settle for anything but a veterinarian that does the best for your dog or cat? All people & all veterinarians (vets are people too!) have different personalities so it is important to find a veterinarian who you are completely satisfied with & trust. If you ask the right questions & do a little research, you can set up a great relationship with the right veterinarian for you & the furry members of your family!

Asking neighbors or relatives where they take their furry family members is a good place to start even though their favorite may or may not end up being the vet you personally prefer long term. However, it is better than trying an animal hospital at random & just seeing what happens. In fact, some of the best hospitals have the least amount of advertising because they rely primarily on word-of-mouth. Also look online for the veterinarians’ websites (www.LevittownVet.com) & professional social media pages (you can find us easily by searching Facebook for Levittown Animal Hospital & Dr. Michael Funk). It is here you may be able to find most of the information you’re looking for! When you think you’ve found the best hospital & veterinarian candidate(s), feel free to call to schedule a visit of the animal hospital & meet the veterinarian(s). Here are some things to be mindful of:

How well does your veterinarian communicate with you? Communication is key – can you easily understand what he or she is trying to say? Does your veterinarian take the time to explain what he/she is doing & why? Communication must not be underestimated. Your veterinarian should be transparent with you & make you feel comfortable with the treatment plan we mutually decide is best for your pet at that time. During the course of your pet’s life, you will have to make some very important decisions & I don’t want anyone to be making important health decisions about their pet without as much information & understanding as possible!

What are your veterinarian’s credentials? Where did your veterinarian obtain his/her training? Where did he/she go to school? How long has he or she been practicing? An internship or residency is specialized training done after graduating as a veterinarian - did he/she complete an internship or residency? Does he/she regularly attend continuing education? It might sound unfathomable, but every year many veterinarians

are caught practicing without a license. It takes just a few seconds to check a doctor's license status online in New York State at www.op.nysed.gov/opsearches.html

How up-to-date is your veterinarian with the latest advances in medicine & surgery? Much like human medicine, veterinary medicine is always changing & improving. The best healthcare options for your pet will only be available if your veterinarian stays up-to-date with the latest research & recommendations by always reading reputable veterinary journals & attending continuing education lectures & workshops. New York State has a mandatory continuing education requirement for veterinarians. Find out how often your prospective doctor attends continuing education lectures. Which national or regional conferences has he/she most recently attended? Which professional journals does he/she read? What other resources does he/she use to gather the most current information? To help gauge how modern & progressive your veterinarian is, ask him/her about his philosophy on pain management & whether or not he/she promotes extended vaccine protocols. Personally & additionally among other endeavors, I have trained in a new & alternative method of castrating male dogs using a non-surgical procedure to achieve the same neutered status.

Does your veterinarian have a good working relationship with veterinary specialists? Gone are the days where general practice veterinarians are expected to know & do everything. Just like human medicine, veterinary medicine has become very specialized with board-certified specialists in internal medicine, surgery, ophthalmology, neurology, dermatology, radiology, oncology, etc. While I, along with the general practitioners with whom I work, are very comfortable handling almost all cases, we also know when it is in a pet's best interest to go to a 24-hour specialty hospital. We may recommend your pet go there for specific diagnostic tests that cannot be performed within our facility or, because we recommend the expertise of a particular veterinary specialist whom we trust.

Is your veterinarian involved in philanthropic & community service endeavors? Veterinary medicine isn't only conducted within an exam room or hospital. Community service is just one way we can stay connected with the pet world outside of the hospital & to appreciate the veterinary profession from other perspectives. Does your veterinarian volunteer his/her time outside of the practice or participate in fundraisers for animals? If you don't know – ask them, they may just extend an invitation!

Is your veterinarian's facility clean, accessible, & inviting? There are close to, or even more than, 100 animal hospitals on Long Island, not including specialty referral centers & emergency clinics. Chances are there is at least one animal hospital close to your home. But the closest veterinarian may not always be the optimal match for you or your pets. Once you are there, look around – is it clean? Does it smell? Is the staff friendly? Do you feel comfortable? Was it easy to make an appointment? How long did you need to wait? The answers to some of these questions will help you gain a feel for the level of standards upheld by the veterinarians at this particular hospital.

Can you afford your veterinarian? There is no correlation between cost & quality. As a topic very important to me, the goal of any veterinarian should be to practice the best medicine possible along with practicality. At some hospitals, the high cost of the initial assessment may make necessary follow up care less affordable. At other hospitals, and besides being more dangerous and possibly painful for your pet, the cheapest initial workup, may cost more, take longer, & risk the health of your pet when constantly more treatments & maybe even second opinions are needed to find an answer! The health of your pet is of utmost importance & warrants a good balance between preventative care when apparently healthy & accurate diagnosing & treatment when sick. This is the best way to keep your pet(s) healthy & keep costs to a minimum.

Hopefully, these guidelines will help you find your “perfect” veterinarian. Above all else, never feel as if you are “stuck” with any particular veterinarian just because “that’s where you’ve always gone.” Doing just a little bit of research is a small price to pay for great pet healthcare with a veterinarian and hospital you can trust! If you ever have any questions or concerns, you are invited to reach out to me at any time!

Michael Funk, DVM (ed. 3/2017)
Dennis Leon, DVM 12/2007



*At the time of this revision, Dr. Michael Funk has earned “Best Veterinarian on Long Island” honors for 6 consecutive years (2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018 & 2019). Dr. Dennis Leon had also received this honor in consecutive prior years. Additionally, Levittown Animal Hospital has been voted “Best Animal Hospital” & “Best Pet Boarding” six of the last eight years including the past five consecutive years.

