

State of Vet Medicine And the Impact of Technology



Adam Little, DVM

Try imagining what the world will look like in 15 or 20 years from now? What do you think will be the world's biggest companies? What tools or products will you use on an everyday basis? It's hard to imagine, right?

Technology is evolving so quickly that it is difficult to keep pace. More importantly, the ways in which companies are created, how teams are managed, and the building blocks that exist for new ideas are all evolving rapidly. To put things in perspective, here are 10 companies that didn't even exist 15 years ago:

- Uber
- Snapchat
- Airbnb
- Dropbox
- Stripe
- Spotify
- Slack
- Instagram
- Facebook

Given how challenging it is to predict the future, it's important to reflect on the fact that most people decide to be veterinarians by the age of 10. It's not just that they decide to want to become a veterinarian, but they have a fairly concrete view of what that job will look like and what duties will be performed.

Our session will focus on the changing veterinary profession and how a number of forces, including the acceleration of technology, our deepening relationship with animals, and a veterinary profession eager for something better, are going to build a different world for clients, patients and the profession.

The first important point to consider is why we as a profession need to change at all. There are three key stakeholders in this relationship that we need to consider: pets, clients and us (the veterinary profession).

Today, most pets do not get the care that they need. A recent study by the University of Tennessee found that 28% of pet owners do not receive any preventative care for their pets. For those that do receive veterinary care, according to AAHA/IDEXX, most pets receive 1/5 of the total care that they should. It's no wonder then that we are beginning to see an alarming increase in diseases like obesity and diabetes. The care model we use today isn't able to effectively serve significant parts of the pet owning public. This is a missed opportunity. We also know that clients have higher expectations than ever before. As pets have moved from the "dog house" to sleeping in our beds (literally!), the nature of people's relationship with their pets is impacting both the kinds of veterinary clinic services being offered and the perception of the value of those services. Clients may be looking for the convenience of a one-touch experience of Amazon with the personalized touch of their doctor; oftentimes delivering on that experience comes at the expense of both.

Most importantly, to deliver healthy pets we need a healthy veterinary profession. We are seeing how the convergence of student debt, burnout and the perception of limited career opportunities are weighing on the minds of veterinary professionals. While we often focus on the need for practitioners to respond to changing expectations, we should be the ones demanding a more sustainable profession for ourselves and our colleagues.

There are already significant changes occurring that are shaping the veterinary profession. Within the past 12 months, we have seen new models of care created, a record amount of investment in pet startups and several high profile acquisitions. There are networks of 100K+ pet sitters available on demand, Uber-like experiences where your vet shows up, and a whole range of devices collecting data on everything from

Adam Little, DVM

your pet's bathroom habits to weight to activity levels. If you feel overwhelmed when you walk through the exhibit hall at a major conference, that is completely normal. It can be exhausting to try to keep up with the latest and greatest and separate fact from fiction.

So where does that leave us? I believe there are three key trends that are going to shift the veterinary practice forward. Each of these is moving rapidly and has a significant impact on each of the stakeholders we listed above.



There are three key trends to unpack that I believe will end up creating a much better world for both professionals and animals alike.

- 1. How we acquire data/learn about our patients**
- 2. How we make decisions**
- 3. How we deliver care**

Today, pets spend less than 0.009% of the year in the veterinary clinic. Veterinarians are under a tremendous amount of pressure to build a relationship with owners, collect essential patient data, synthesize a course of action and incorporate any other trade-offs (cost, compliance, etc.) that are in play – all in less than 30 minutes. That's hard to do. What ends up happening is similar to an iceberg effect. It just isn't possible to see the entire picture given the limited time and data we have available. Through connected devices, genomics and other technologies, we are soon going to be practicing in an environment where we have access to more patient data than we ever thought possible. We will need to enrich our medical records with new data streams that are primarily generated outside the traditional practice.

It is difficult for us, as humans, to process incredibly large amounts of information, especially in a world where that information is being generated more quickly than ever before. We will need machines to help us make sense of this information and augment our own clinical decision making. This is already happening today. More than 10+ AI solutions in the human medical space already have FDA approval. Machines are helping doctors analyze radiographs, interpret ECGs, identify trends in medical histories, etc. We too will begin to work alongside these capabilities in a relationship similar to the one that we share with a stethoscope. In my lifetime, it will likely be considered negligent to practice medicine in a world where you aren't using these capabilities to improve the accuracy of your medical decisions and, as a result, we will be able to support more patients, with a higher degree of confidence.

Veterinary medicine has historically been bound to brick and mortar locations, but the next era of veterinary practice will be the bridging of the online and offline worlds to create a seamless experience for clients. Veterinary medicine can't be reduced to a single app or algorithm, but rather is a much more human experience. Instead of trying to automate our jobs, we will instead find models of care that allow us to augment our ability to provide care. In doing so, the best models will focus on expanding the unique skill sets and creating more space for the things that make veterinarians truly special. For example, while chatbots may support triage of different cases, this will allow practitioners to focus on prioritizing their training from virtual care opportunities to more flexible work environments, to entirely new career paths.

It is an incredibly exciting time to be part of this profession. We need to create a much more positive conversation on the future of veterinary medicine and create a generation of veterinarians who don't just want to observe this future, but rather work to build the one they want.



Adam Little, DVM

OBJECTIVES

1. Provide you with an understanding of veterinary, consumer and industry trends impacting the profession.
2. Provide you with a framework of how to think about the emerging technologies and companies in the space.
3. Provide you with best practices in how to assess new tools, evaluate opportunities for your practice growth and implementation strategies for success.

BIG TRENDS IN VETERINARY MEDICINE

- Review the updated [AVMA Pet Demographics Study](#) (Executive summary is free for members)
- Review the [Pet Owner Paths Whitepaper](#) by Merck (great insights on what clients are looking for)
- Check out the **Model Practice Act** created by the American Association of Veterinary State boards that provides guidance on the future of VCPR
- Review survey [findings from the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons](#) (UK-based) on telehealth
- Check out the [Pet Insight Project](#) which is mapping wearable data with medical record data

SOLUTIONS

- [Zipwhip](#)
Easy texting with clients from your existing landline
- [Televet & Medici](#)
Provide telehealth services to your clients
- [FuturePet](#)
A subscription care plan for clients that is no effort and \$0 to practices
- [Fuzzy & Vetted](#)
“Uber” for vet models
- [Petnostics](#)
In-home diagnostic kits
- [Wisdom Panel & Embark](#)
Genetic screening kits for owners
- [Rover & Wag](#)
On-Demand Dog Walking/ Boarding Services
- [Fitbark & Petpace & Whistle](#)
- Pet wearable devices

KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER

- The world is changing. These changes are happening faster and many are coming from outside of the industry.
- Focus on digitizing the trust you have with clients, augmenting your team and scaling your experience.
- The veterinary journey begins long before the in-person visit and long after the in-person visit.
- We are entering an incredibly exciting time and we need to be builders of the future we want, not passengers.
- Small teams of people can do extraordinary things.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What tools are we using to communicate with our clients? Do they have overlapping functionality? Is everyone trained on them?
- What impact are these solutions having? How do we measure success, etc.?
- How do they use our data? What services are accessing client patient information? How do we think about consent?