



Newbies News: Choosing a Vet Are They All The Same?

By Warren Johnson



vonwarterr@cox.net

www.vonwarterr.net



Warterr's Zack von der Jack (Koda)

When you purchase a new puppy and bring it home, it ought to be in perfect health. A puppy who is in prime condition has been born and raised in a clean environment with good nutrition, proper exercise, and current vaccines and dewormings. It is now your responsibility to maintain its good health. You need to continue to provide an environment that is conducive to healthy growth. You must provide a nutritious diet, appropriate exercise, lots of love, and high quality medical care. It is essential that you and a professional veterinarian form a close working relationship in order to maximize your dog's health care. You and your vet of choice must perform as a team. You will need to trust one another's abilities and observations so that your pup can receive the best possible medical treatment.



Sherwood South Animal Hospital in
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

A dog is man's best friend and you are your dog's best friend. A competent veterinarian is your dog's second best friend! Therefore you must carefully choose a great vet for your pup. When choosing a vet, you want more than just someone who is knowledgeable about veterinary medicine. You want someone who can meet both your needs and your pup's needs. A great vet possesses both people skills and animal skills. The worst time to be looking for a great vet is when you need one immediately. Establish who your pet's vet will be prior to needing his or her services. The best way to

start your search for a vet is to ask for recommendations. Compile your list of recommended vets from family members, friends, neighbors, dog trainers, groomers, and boarding facilities. Veterinary schools can also refer you to alumni who

have established practices in your area. If you purchased your pup from a local breeder, then they will probably be your best source of information. Some vets work better with certain breeds or species than others. Some vets are not as comfortable treating a large working breed like the Rottweiler. Ask prospective vets how many Rottweilers they treat in their clinic. Some vets refuse to do certain procedures such as ear cropping, tail docking, and dewclaw removal, so make sure they can perform the tasks you may need.

After you have made your list of possibilities, it is time to start doing your homework. Check if they are members of the American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA). AAHA membership indicates that they have voluntarily pursued and met certain standards in regards to their facilities, equipment, and quality of care. These vet hospitals submit a detailed report of their facilities, equipment, and services offered, and then are inspected by a consultant to ensure that they meet the established standards.

You will need to decide if you want a small veterinary office versus a larger clinic or hospital. Many people have a perception that you can get more of a "personal touch" from a small practice. That may or may not be the case, but keep in mind that a larger practice will usually have the resources to employ a team of professional medical experts and also tend to have more and better equipment available. They will also be able to offer a wider range of services. I think it is best to have your pet see the same vet each time he goes for treatment so that a bond of trust and familiarity can be established. However, it is an added advantage if there is a panel of doctors working at the establishment for consultation on cases. If you decide to go with a smaller operation, be sure to find out what their policies and procedures are for emergency medical care, because eventually you will need medical attention for your pet after regular office hours. Location is not your primary concern when choosing a vet, but it is an important factor to keep in mind. You don't want to sacrifice quality care, but you do want quick access to your vet. If you have to drive across town with a sick or injured dog, the amount of time it takes to get those trained hands on your dog may make the difference between life and death.

Ask if a potential vet has an in-house lab and diagnostic facilities for tests such as ultrasounds, EKG, and endoscopy, or if those tests have to be outsourced. This makes a difference in the amount of time it takes to get test results and it can drive up costs. Also ask whether or not they



accept pet medical insurance or have any form of financing large medical bills that can sometimes occur with surgery or emergency services. Check with the Veterinary Medical Board to find out if there are complaints against this particular veterinarian. If it is a large practice that has been in business for a long time, then it is understandable that there may be a few registered complaints.

To be continued in Issue 2 of 2011