

How To Choose a Veterinarian

By Tawni McBee, PDTI

A Veterinarian is a very important person to find if you have animals in your home. If possible, you should research to find a good Vet before you bring your pet home. If you move or your Vet leaves or you feel you must change Vets, do so promptly before your pet needs them. If you are simply looking for a person to impersonally give shots and routine care, you may not care about this article. On the other hand, maybe this article will help you understand how much of a difference there can be when your Vet is a part of your team.

You can ask friends, co-workers, and neighbors about their Vets and/or you can conduct interviews to find a Vet. The combination is especially useful because though one Vet may be perfect for your neighbor, they may not meet your needs at all. When you decide to conduct an interview, you should set up a questionnaire ahead of time with questions about things that are important to you and your pets. Make the questions brief and concise. Plan to interview at least 3 - 4 Vets before you make your decision. When you call to set up an interview appointment, be sure you tell the receptionist exactly what you are doing so the Vet is not taken by surprise and the office can plan accordingly. Expect to pay a normal office visit fee for the interview as you are taking up the Vet's valuable time. You might ask how much the office visit will be when you make your appointment so you don't have a surprise either. Only you will be able to make the final decision about which Vet is the right one for you.

You might want to take your pet with you when you go to your appointment. You can then see how the staff and the Vet react to your pet and how your pet reacts to them and the facility. Be sure you tell the receptionist when you make your appointment that you will have a pet with you, but not for an exam.

In addition to the Vet, you may want to observe the office staff, including the receptionists, technicians and other support staff. How you are treated on the phone may or may not be important to you, but how the staff treats you and your animals is important. You and your pet should be treated with respect. Usually there's no need for formal questions of the staff. Just talk to them and you should be able to learn a lot. Whether you want formal or casual responses from them will be a part of your final decision.

You may want to find out how many other Vets practice in the clinic and if there is a standard of care that all the Vets practicing there agree on. Your impressions of the facility are also important. Some Vets will arrange a tour for you to see at least a part of the clinic; some are not able to do that due to the way the area is arranged. In any case, if the clinic is not clean or there is a bad odor or an attempt to cover up bad odors (lit candles, incense, and heavy air fresheners) you probably won't want to pick that clinic.

Don't let a crowded waiting room spook you. Just talk with the other clients waiting and ask if they always have to wait a long time or ask the receptionist if there is a back-up that day.

Below are a few sample questions that you might want to ask. You will need to add, delete or change details as it suits you and your pets. For example, if your pet has a chronic disease, you will want to know if this Vet has experience dealing with the disease. Take a clip board and a pen with you and take notes. Try to stick to the purpose of the visit and don't take up more time than you have to.

1. What are the costs for an office visit? For blood work? For spay/neuter?
2. Will you consider us a team in caring for my pet?
3. What are your recommendations for vaccinations?
4. Is there any care you cannot provide in your office? How do you deal with it?
5. Do you offer emergency service? If not, where do you refer emergencies?
6. Do you consider making house calls for special situations?
7. Do you have experience in treating [name of disease or condition here]?
8. Do you board pets? What are the rates?
9. Is there staff here if my dog is kept overnight?
10. Do you have any questions you'd like to ask me?

Now add to or change these to suit your special needs. For example, you may be looking for a holistic Vet or one who will cooperate with the use of herbs. You may want a clinic where the Vets make the decisions, not a corporate office. Once you've made your decision, you might want to thank the other Vets for their interviews. This is all a part of good communication and good communication goes a long way and leaves doors open for the future.

By Tawni McBee, PDTI

Tawni has had several pets with chronic illness and has had to change Vets several times in the past few years as her Vets have moved to other areas or more specific treatments were needed. Each time she has interviewed several Vets and has managed to find some of the best the area has to offer. Tawni is a holistic professional dog trainer, co-founder and practitioner of the TAP method of dog body care, and co-owner of All Greatful Dogs, Inc.