

What Will Be the Defining Innovation From the Pandemic?

COMPILED BY PATRICIA WUEST

Restructuring personal priorities — many veterinary professionals used the challenges and opportunities of curbside service, staffing shortages and realignment of client relationships to reflect on their own personal well-being. The result is an increasing emphasis on physical and mental health combined with a renewed focus on finding meaning in their lives. I believe the “Pandemic Generation” will demand more from their vocation than a steady paycheck and insist on healthy environments, nurturing leaders and more time off to pursue personal fulfillment.

Ernie Ward, DVM, CVFT, Today's Veterinary Business “Opening Shots” columnist

We need to recognize that pets are terrified if they are separated from their pet parents (and there is a study to demonstrate that). That means

masks for everyone inside our practices, and then allow our clients to be present with their beloved animal family members. My practice chose never to banish pet owners to their cars — which set it apart in the state of Colorado. Being in our space meant wearing a mask 100% of the time. This is still the case. We gained countless new clients and patients because we kept the human-animal bond at the center of our days. Other practices can learn from our example.

Robin Downing, DVM, MS, PhD, DAAPM, DACVSMR, hospital director, Windsor Veterinary Clinic and the Downing Center for Animal Pain Management

That, lo and behold, we can change the way we do things, such as curbside drop-off and telemed/health/triage. And while not a defining innovation but rather a pivotal time for our industry, we have to solve the

shortage problem — addressing DEI, compassion fatigue and attrition, debt, career pathing and all of the things that will encourage people to join and stay in our profession.

Jennifer Welser, DVM, DACVO, chief medical officer, Mars Veterinary Health

Leveraging credentialed staff to forge relationships with clients and attend to medical appointments. Without our emergency and critical care veterinary nursing professionals, the current wait times in our ER hospitals would be far worse. Clients are eager to see a veterinary professional, and with additional education campaigns, we will help make these interactions more commonplace, allowing veterinarians to tend to truly critical cases.

Christine M. Crick, CVT, RVT, LVT, VTS (Anesthesia & Analgesia, ECC)

There were several converging/colliding issues that the veterinary profession could/should have been ready for, and while the pandemic did not cause it, it shined a light on the veterinary workforce shortage (veterinarians, veterinary technicians, client service representatives and everyone else who is essential to veterinary practices). Shame on us as a profession

I hope the incorporation of telehealth into our practice and care. Also, I hope the ability to be flexible and embrace change as it comes. Our industry truly rose to and faced the challenges.

**Beckie Mossor, RVT
Co-host of the “Veterinary Viewfinder” podcast**

that we have allowed 50% of veterinary technicians to leave our beloved profession because we did not compensate them adequately and treat them with respect and allow them to practice at the top of their skills and license — which we know are the two main reasons they leave our profession within five to six years. How can we use this lesson to ensure we're all looking out over the horizon to prevent similar situations from happening in the future?

Rustin Moore, DVM, PhD, DACVS, dean, College of Veterinary Medicine, The Ohio State University

More streamlined veterinary care with regard to handling clients as well as an increasing recognition of the importance of veterinary staff.

Gary Richter, DVM, MS, owner, Montclair Veterinary Hospital

The mundane-but-real defining innovation will be text messaging with clients. The truth is that veterinarians are slow adopters of technology, and most had not adopted texting pre-2020. When we consider what innovation that most veterinary clinics started using during the pandemic and how frequently they use the innovation, texting will win hands-down. The innovation that will be remembered as “defining” will be virtual visits, although I suspect their real traction in the profession will be coming in the near future.

Andy Roark, DVM, MS, Today's Veterinary Business “Discharge Notes” columnist

The ability to go from genetically sequencing a new pathogen to having a vaccine.

**David S. Bruyette, DVM, DACVIM
Founder and CEO, Veterinary Diagnostic Investigation and Consultation**

With telemedicine and curbside service, veterinarians adapted to ensure care could be provided.

Charlotte Lacroix, DVM, JD, Veterinary Business Advisors, Inc.

Using LVTs to deliver high-value services — not just substituting for doctors in client communication roles. The most successful practices found ways to use them at their fullest — follow-up visits, diagnostic workups, wellness services, anesthesia, dental care.

Douglas G. Aspros, DVM, chief veterinary officer, Veterinary Practice Partners

A profession often accused of being slow to adapt proved that it could change, adjust, adapt and innovate. The defining innovation was likely the adoption of technology to better connect clients with the veterinary team. From teletriage to telehealth to telemedicine to client communication apps.

Bob Lester, DVM, co-founder, WellHaven Pet Health

In my world of cats and their people, the pandemic has made “citizen-diagnostics” of our clients. We have moved heavily

into teaching caregivers to submit short videos of their cats at home as a regular part of the physical exam. We should have been doing this intensively for years, knowing that cats don't manifest normal behaviors in the exam room as they would at home. For example, watching a cat climb the stairs at home is incredibly instructive when that same cat would turn into a “loaf of bread” in the veterinary setting. The pandemic forced us to find new ways to get information about our patients, and this is one of the really powerful tools we are using.

Elizabeth Collieran, DVM, DABVP, medical director, Chico Hospital for Cats

As a scientist, I'd love to say that the defining innovation was the rapid development of mRNA coronavirus vaccines, even though stable mRNA delivery systems have been in the works for decades, as has the development of mRNA technology. As an educator, I would say the widespread adoption of Zoom for meetings was the most significant “innovation,” although that technology has also been around for years.

Kenneth Harkin, DVM, DACVIM (SAIM), professor, College of Veterinary Medicine, Kansas State University ■