The Human-Animal Bond: What is it? What is the Veterinarian’s Role?

In recent years the term “human-animal bond” has come into common usage. But what is the human-animal bond and what is the veterinarian’s role in this aspect of life?

As a veterinary student graduating in 1970, the term “human-animal bond” was appearing in a few veterinary journals that were relating news articles on the positive results from the presence of animals (especially dogs) in the practices of clinical psychologists. Concurrently a few veterinarians such as the late Dr. Leo Bustad were advocating research of, and programs involving the relationship between people, animals, and the environment as well as the need for compassion toward people and animals.

As a general practitioner of small animals (primarily dogs and cats), the emotional significance of many patients to the families and individuals who entrusted them to me for medical and surgical care was profoundly apparent. Despite an absence of professional training in emotions and related communications, I muddled through my client’s and staff’s...
emotional manifestations of another aspect of practice life that fell under the heading of the term “human-animal bond.” I soon realized that the very essence of my life as a companion animal practitioner was dependent on the nebulous concept of the human-animal bond.

I was relieved to read the following definition and statement in the June 1, 1998 edition of JAVMA.

“The human-animal bond is a mutually beneficial and dynamic relationship between people and other animals that is influenced by behaviors that are essential to the health and well being of both. This includes, but is not limited to, emotional, psychological, and physical interactions of people, other animals, and the environment. The veterinarian’s role in the human-animal bond is to maximize the potentials of this relationship between people and other animals.”

I felt a sigh of relief when I saw this definition and statement because it simplified a concept that seemed ambiguous to me. It also validated a philosophical thought with regard to a personal belief of what the role of the veterinarian should be.

The interpretation and implementation of this definition and statement is an individual matter. However, I offer some questions:

1. As we know, the relationship between people, non-human animals, and the environment is a precarious balance. Are veterinarians in a primary position because of their training and aesculapian authority to be a positive influence on the stewardship of this relationship on a local, regional, and global basis? If the answer is yes, then how shall we do that?
2. How important are our actions and words to the long-term physical and emotional health of our clients, their animals, their children, and our children? If these actions and words are important, how can we optimize our effectiveness?
3. How great is the potential importance of the veterinary profession in facilitating a better future for living things?

In my view veterinary medical professionals are more knowledgeable and potentially (if not actually) more intimately involved with stewardship of the relationship between people, other animals, and the environment than any other profession. What other group of professionals has more knowledge and deals more intimately with the reproduction, living, dying, and utilization (the circle of life) of domestic and non-domestic resources than the veterinary profession? What profession deals with the circle of life on a global basis and is held in higher esteem by the public than the veterinary profession? Should we motivate our profession to prioritize the maximization of the relationship between people other animals, and the environment with compassion, wisdom, and knowledge? If so, how shall we succeed?

Your thoughts with regard to the above commentary or any other H-AB relevant issues are welcome and encouraged. You may reply to the author, or send a letter to the editor.

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Erratum in the AAHABV Newsletter, 2000, combined issues 3 & 4:

The last sentence of the first paragraph of The Message From the President in the last issue of the AAHABV Newsletter was inadvertently omitted. This sentence referred readers to the Definition and Statement of the Human-Animal Bond which appears in the previous article and on page 6 of this issue.

Dr. Wright’s email address was improperly listed in the AAHABV 2000-2001 Board of Directors section of the last newsletter. His correct email address is wrigh008@tc.umn.edu (no “t” is as it should be). It is correct in this issue.

Newsletter Editor Position Open

The American Association of Human-Animal Bond Veterinarians is in search of an editor for our newsletter. Requirements for the position include good writing skills, good literature review skills, as well as a good degree of knowledge and/or desire to learn about the human-animal bond. A DVM degree is preferred, but not necessarily required. A passion for and belief in the role of the veterinarian in the HAB may be the most important attribute for a good editor. It is expected that much of the labor involved with putting a newsletter together can be done as collaboration between an editor and others experienced in layout and printing of a newsletter (a teamwork effort). This is a great opportunity to have an impact on the veterinary profession as well as the interrelationship between people, animals, and the environment.

Please contact me if you are interested in this position, can identify others who may be interested, or would like further details. Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely, John S. Wright DVM

Please direct your inquiries to:

John S. Wright, DVM

Dept. of Small Animal Clinical Sciences

University of Minnesota College of Veterinary Medicine

1352 Boyd Ave. Saint Paul, MN 55108

Phone: (612)626-1280

email: John Wright <wrigh008@tc.umn.edu>

AAHABV NEWSLETTER – 2001, #1 – PAGE # 2
As a counselor, I also want to know as much as possible from the veterinarian's point of view, in order to better help my client, and if possible, to help make emotional issues a little easier for client and veterinarian.

Judith C. Stutts, PhD

In January, 2000, I was a Waltham-sponsored lecturer for Tuskegee and Auburn Alabama veterinary medical students. As a Licensed Professional Counselor specializing in Pet Bereavement Counseling, I was lucky to have spent some time with their faculty, including Dr. Caroline Schaffer. I want to publicly add my congratulations to Dr. Schaffer for being honored as the winner of the Leo K. Bustad Companion Animal Veterinarian of the year 2000. I am very grateful that she shared her time and her comments about human-animal bond issues. As a counselor, I also want to know as much as possible from the veterinarian's point of view, in order to better help my client, and if possible, to help make emotional issues a little easier for client and veterinarian.

Because of my counseling background and research in human-animal bond issues, I would like to take this opportunity to express my keen interest in the newly formed committee on Body of Knowledge/Philosophical and Practical Directions. It seems to be vitally important to have collaboration across the disciplines to develop a truly holistic approach to the human-animal bond. I applaud your continuing efforts to discover and then apply information that gets us closer to the essence of the human-animal bond.

My lectures in Alabama, as elsewhere, continue to reinforce my resolve to lecture about grief and loss issues and to validate the importance of educating students and staff members about the human-animal bond and the breaking of that bond. As a counselor, I am committed to listening and responding to pet owners after they have said their good-byes at a veterinary clinic.

Too often, it is only then that the harsh reality of living without a loved companion hits home, and the pet owner is left to grieve, leaving a very empty space in their homes and in their hearts. To those who seek to fill those empty spaces with healing, I warmly applaud your efforts. To those who turn to me and other counselors to sometimes help with the healing process, I welcome the opportunity and say, "thank you."

Judith C. Stutts, PhD

Associate Member, AAHABV
Asheboro, North Carolina

Call for papers

Do you have a presentation related to veterinary medicine and the human-animal bond that you would like to deliver at the AVMA annual Convention in Nashville, Tennessee July 13-17, 2002? The American Association of Human-Animal Bond Veterinarians will sponsor one and one-half days of presentations in the companion animal section of the program during the meeting. If you have a particular topic that you would like to speak on you may get further information by contacting Dr. Guy Hancock at: hancockg@spjc.edu.

In the News

Significant Joint Meeting

On November 4, 2000, an important joint meeting took place at the American Veterinary Medical Association Headquarters in...
Schaumburg, Illinois. Organizations and representatives included at this meeting were:

The American Veterinary Medical Association Human Animal Bond Committee (Drs. R.K. Anderson, Greg Hammer, James Harris, Martha Littlefield-Chabaud, John New), Vet One (Drs. Marty Becker and Kathy Mitchner), Delta Society (Drs. Merry Crimi and Robert Franklin), The American Association of Human-Animal Bond Veterinarians (Drs. Guy Hancock and John Wright).

This meeting was of importance because for the first time representatives of these organizations were brought together to discuss their missions and objectives as well as the roles they have played in the human-animal bond.

In addition to learning first-hand about the mission and goals of each of the organizations represented the group discussed the definition of the human-animal bond as published by the AVMA Committee on The Human Animal Bond. Not surprisingly, all of those present agreed that this definition fit with their organizations.

Perhaps the most important outcome of this meeting was the unanimous agreement between representatives that they will collaborate to improve the area of the human-animal bond. The feeling of kindred spirits working together toward common goals was pervasive in the atmosphere of this meeting.

Dr. Earl O. Strimple,
Recipient of the 2001 Hill’s Animal Welfare and Humane Ethics Award

At the recent AAHA Annual Meeting, Dr. Earl O. Strimple was awarded the Hill’s Animal Welfare and Humane Ethics Award for 2001. Dr. Strimple earned his DVM from The Ohio State University. He founded the MacArthur Animal Hospital in Washington, D.C. in 1973, which has been an AAHA member hospital since 1974.

Since his recent retirement from practice, he spends the majority of his time working with P-A-L (People-Animals-Love), an organization he established in 1981, that organizes volunteers to bring animals to the lonely and socially isolated, such as those in nursing homes, hospitals, schools, and prisons. He has long been involved in human-animal bond activities, serving as president of the American Association of Human-Animal Bond Veterinarians in 1996-1997. He is also a past president of the Delta Society.

Dr. Strimple recently founded a second non-profit organization, Compass Rose Outreach, to export medicine to the people of Cuba. He has been recognized with numerous awards, is a noted speaker and author, and is a perfect example that in addition to practicing quality veterinary medicine, veterinarians are in a position to do much, much more.

### Dr. Robert K. Anderson Honored for Dedication to Humane Ideals

The American Humane Association has awarded Dr. Robert K. Anderson, a retired professor of veterinary medicine and director of the Center to Study Human-Animal Relationships and Environment at the University of Minnesota, its Waco F. Childers award for outstanding contributions to humane ideals. Dr. Anderson was honored at the annual AHA conference in Atlanta. He is a leading authority on animal behavior and pet abandonment and a member of AAHABV.

"Each year, the American Humane Association honors an individual with the Waco F. Childers Award for work that has truly made a difference in the lives of animals," said Timothy O’Brien, president of AHA. "This year, I am especially proud to present this award to Dr. Robert K. Anderson. From the time he was a child and knew he wanted to be a veterinarian, to his groundbreaking work at the University of Minnesota, Dr. Anderson’s career is one that exemplifies a commitment to humane ideals."

Dr. Anderson began his career as director of Veterinary Public Health for Denver. During and following a rabies epidemic in dogs in that area, he worked with the Denver Dumb Friends League to increase responsible pet ownership. He soon discovered overpopulation to be the leading killer of pets and that an animal’s undesirable behavior was the number one reason pets were taken to shelters. Intrigued by the role animal behavior played in the tragedy of pet overpopulation, he continued his education in animal behavior and psychology and became professor of veterinary medicine and public health at the University of Minnesota.
Members are welcome to submit news items of importance to the editor for inclusion in this space.

Featured University-Sponsored Programs

University of Tennessee
By Dr. John New

Welcome to
The University of Tennessee
College of Veterinary Medicine

H.A.B.I.T.
(Human-Animal Bond in Tennessee)

H.A.B.I.T. was founded in 1986 by a group of individuals including faculty of the University of Tennessee College of Veterinary Medicine in Knoxville. The mission of H.A.B.I.T. is to explore the circumstances and consequences of the human-animal bond and to promote this valuable bond between people and animals.

The organization has 244 active volunteers using 301 medically and behaviorally screened animals to make over 30,000 visits annually. Active volunteers consist of UTCVM faculty, staff and students, as well as a large number of volunteers from local communities.

H.A.B.I.T. currently coordinates animal visitation programs at 64 sites in 6 counties in East Tennessee (Knox, Anderson, Blount, Sevier, Loudon, Roane). Program sites include nursing homes, assisted-living residences, retirement centers, mental health centers, residences for children with special needs, rehabilitation facilities, and hospitals. It offers resources such as trained volunteers, medically and behaviorally screened animals, and guidance regarding animal visitation, program development, and evaluation.

General information meetings are held twice a year in January and September. Attendance is required for people who are considering becoming volunteers. In 2000, 126 people attended these meetings. Animals are evaluated in three ways. A medical evaluation form is filled out by the veterinarian-of-record and sent to the H.A.B.I.T. office along with a behavioral profile and history form filled out by the owner (copies of forms are available upon request, see web site below). Once these two forms are received, they are assigned to a H.A.B.I.T. evaluator who does a behavioral evaluation of the animal including some tests with and some without the owner. Once animals are approved, the team (owner and animal) are oriented to a facility under the supervision of an experienced volunteer.

Facilities interested in a H.A.B.I.T. program must fill out an application which includes a protocol, send a representative to one of the information meetings, have a meeting with the program development specialist, and, if required by state regulations, have a waiver letter from the TN Board for Licensing Health Care Facilities. If approved by the H.A.B.I.T. Executive Committee, the new program is staffed with volunteers. Facilities pay an annual fee for the program.

For more information about HAB.I.T., visit our web site at http://web.utk.edu/80/~vetmed/habit/index.htm.

H.A.L.T.
(Humans and Animals Learning Together)

H.A.L.T. was founded in 1987 and is sponsored in part by the University of Tennessee College of Veterinary Medicine (UTCVM). The mission of H.A.L.T. is to provide a therapeutic intervention for at-risk adolescents through dog obedience training. Through a series of classes, a canine obedience instructor helps student trainers teach basic obedience commands to dogs that have been selected from an animal shelter. Suitable dogs are medically and behaviorally screened. Student trainers are adolescents from
residential centers for treatment of substance abuse, behavioral, or alienation problems.

In general H.A.L.T. sponsors two classes each year. Each class runs for four to six weeks not counting the dog selection and quarantine phase. In 2000, 71 adolescents participated from six different agencies.

"Dominique"
25 lbs., Border Collie-Shelti Mix
She loves attention & stays close by her trainer or owner.


H.E.R.O.
(Humane Education and Responsible Ownership) of Pets

H.E.R.O. of Pets was founded in 1997 and is a consortium of six organizations in the Knoxville, TN area: The Cat Clinic, H.A.B.I.T., Humane Society of the Tennessee Valley, Knoxville Academy of Veterinary Medicine, Oak Ridge Kennel Club, and University of Tennessee College of Veterinary Medicine. Its mission is to promote responsible and humane pet ownership through educational projects.

Projects completed in the last two years include a pet loss bereavement seminar for the general public and veterinary professionals, a seminar on animal death and human emotion specifically designed for animal shelter workers and laboratory animal technicians, and a seminar for dog owners on understanding their dog's behavior and preventing behavior problems. In April, 2001, H.E.R.O. will sponsor a seminar for cat owners and veterinary professionals on understanding cat behavior and preventing behavior problems.

In addition, H.E.R.O. has just published the second edition (2001) of a directory of animal services and organizations that covers a nine county area. The directory is divided into two parts: a directory of services and organizations (e.g., adoption centers, veterinary practices, pet loss help line, etc.) and a section on general pet owner education (e.g., tips on selecting pets, modifying chewing and house soiling in puppies, finding an obedience trainer or behavior consultant, etc.). It is the hope of the organization that the usefulness of the directory will be a conduit for the pet owner information and thus impact some pet owners who might not get this information from other sources. Our plan is to revise the directory every other year. The first edition of the directory (1999) can be seen at http://www.vet.utk.edu/habitlhero/heroindx.htm.

Human-Animal Bond: Definition and Statement

The human-animal bond is a mutually beneficial and dynamic relationship between people and other animals that is influenced by behaviors that are essential to the health and well being of both. This includes, but is not limited to, emotional, psychological, and physical interactions of people, other animals and the environment. The veterinarian's role in the human-animal bond is to maximize the potentials of this relationship between people and other animals.  

1 Statement from the AVMA Committee on The Human-Animal Bond in JAVMA vol. 212, No. 11, p 1675, June 1, 1998.
Human Animal Bond Lecture Schedule, AVMA 2001
Tuesday, July 17
Building The Human-Animal Bond in Companion Animal Practice:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Speaker</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8:00-8:15</td>
<td>Recognition of Dr. Leo Bustad and the previous Leo Bustad Companion Animal Veterinarians of the Year</td>
<td>Caroline Schaffer D.V.M. introduces John New D.V.M.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8:15-9:00</td>
<td>Leo Bustad Memorial Lecture: &quot;The Human-Animal Bond: Strains, Sprains &amp; Fractures; Prevention &amp; Healing&quot;</td>
<td>John New D.V.M.</td>
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<tr>
<td>9:00-9:30</td>
<td>Pet Owner Care in a Bond Centered Practice</td>
<td>Carolyn Butler BA, MS</td>
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<tr>
<td>9:30-10:15</td>
<td>Break</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>10:15-11:00</td>
<td>At Risk Clients: How to recognize and How to Help</td>
<td>Susan Cohen Ph.D.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11:00-11:45</td>
<td>At Risk Clients (cont.)</td>
<td>Dr. Susan Cohen Ph.D.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11:45-1:00</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1:00-2:30</td>
<td>Client Present Euthanasia and End of Life Issues in a Bond Centered Practice</td>
<td>Carolyn Butler BA, MS</td>
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<tr>
<td>2:45-3:45</td>
<td>Ethical Considerations: Aesculpiian Authority, Veterinary Practice and The Human-Animal Bond</td>
<td>Bernard Rollin Ph.D.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3:45-4:15</td>
<td>Panel Discussion: Companion Animal Practice &amp; the Human-Animal Bond</td>
<td>Presenters of the day &amp; Audience</td>
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<tr>
<td>4:30</td>
<td>AAHABV Annual Business Meeting (Refreshments Provided)</td>
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Human Animal Bond Lecture Schedule, AVMA 2001

Wednesday, July 18
Building The Human-Animal Bond in Companion Animal Practice:

Quality of Life, Practice Outreach, & Preventing Dog Bites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Speaker</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8:00-9:00</td>
<td>Quality of Life in Animals</td>
<td>Franklin McMillan D.V.M., ACVIM</td>
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<tr>
<td>9:00-9:30</td>
<td>Veterinarian assisted Community Outreach Programs</td>
<td>Earl Strimple D.V.M.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:30-9:45</td>
<td>Break</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:45-10:45</td>
<td>Human-animal Bond Foundation Building &amp; Outreach</td>
<td>Guy Hancock D.V.M.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:45-11:15</td>
<td>Dog Bite Prevention</td>
<td>Gail Golab D.V.M. &amp; Sally Walsh D.V.M.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please submit news, articles, events, awards and anything of interest for future issues of the AAHABV Newsletter to Sally Walshaw, 4550 Comanche Drive, Okemos, MI 48864 or email to walshaw@msu.edu
Established in July 1993, the objectives of AAHABV are:

- To further veterinary awareness of the human-animal bond
- To further scientific progress in the area of the human-animal bond
- To further educational opportunities in the area of the human-animal bond
- To encourage veterinary participation in human-animal bond activities with related organizations and disciplines
- To explore the potential for establishing a veterinary specialty in the area of the human-animal bond

American Association of Human-Animal Bond Veterinarians
AAHABV
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Secretary/Treasurer
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