

Points on Pets: Aspiring vets often inspired early on

by R.G. Elmore, D.V.M.

Q: Although we do not know exactly why, our high school daughter has never wavered from wanting to be a veterinarian since she was about 5 years old. She has had many pets and has brought many orphaned wild birds, turtles and other small animals home to nurse. She has had very little experience actually working for or observing a veterinarian. Her friends have told our daughter that is very difficult to get admitted to a veterinary college. Therefore, we are wondering what she should do now to prepare herself to be a good applicant when she completes her application in a few years.

A: Your daughter's desire to become a veterinarian starting at a very young age is not uncommon. In fact, about half of all the veterinary students currently enrolled within our nation's 28 veterinary colleges decided to become veterinarians by the time they were in the seventh grade, or about 12 years old. Being a veterinarian is a great way to help people by helping their animals.

On a national scale, there are about three to four qualified applicants for each position in veterinary college each year. Therefore, getting into a program is competitive. All of the veterinary colleges in the United States rank their applicants using a combination of scores earned on national standardized examinations such as the Graduate Record Examination, grade-point average on required college courses, and subjective criteria such as animal experience, veterinary experience, extracurricular college activities, work experience and letters of reference.

Veterinary college admissions committees generally look for applicants who have the following personal characteristics: a strong desire to be a veterinarian; a sincere compassion for both people and animals and a strong respect for all life; personal integrity and high ethical standards; excellent written and oral communication skills; a commitment to the betterment of humanity and the improvement of one's community, society, and profession; an understanding of the world and its many cultures; a documented strong academic ability in the sciences; and a commitment to lifelong learning.

Most veterinarians have completed more than eight years of college - four years of preveterinary college courses and four years of veterinary college. Veterinarians are educated to provide the same level of health care for animals that is expected from physicians providing human health care. In addition to providing health care for animals, many veterinarians are involved in making sure that our food supply, particularly animal products, are safe for our consumption.

Anyone interested in becoming a veterinarian should contact the colleges of veterinary medicine in which she or he is interested for specific admissions policies and requirements. All of the colleges have Web sites containing much valuable information.

Q: Our dog becomes very aggressive whenever my husband trims his toenails. Is this normal? I get so

upset by our dog's reactions that I must leave the house whenever toe trimming is done.

A: It is not unusual for many dogs to resist having their toenails trimmed, particularly if they have been hurt previously by having their nails cut too short. Dogs that vigorously resist toenail trimming at home should be taken to a veterinarian for trimming. Veterinarians have paraprofessionals who can properly restrain dogs without hurting them and the veterinarian can control bleeding if the nails are accidentally cut too short. Neither the dogs nor their owners should have to suffer during a routine nail trim.

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