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New Study Looks at How Veterinarians Spend Time in Their Practices

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Skin disorders are the most common cause for patient visits to the veterinarian's office, according to a nationwide survey of small animal practitioners conducted by the Alpo Pet Center in June, 1985.

Of the 2,540 veterinarians polled, 90% indicated dermatological disorders as the most frequently seen animal health problem in their practice.

The next five most frequent categories for which pet owners sought veterinary help for their dogs and cats were (in order of frequency) gastrointestinal disorders, urinary tract problems, dental disease, nutritional counseling and trauma cases. Conversely, disorders rarely seen included cardiac conditions, cancer, pulmonary problems, endocrine disorders and problems relating to the reproductive system (See bar graphs).

The most significant trend seen by the veterinarians was the rise in office visits over the last few years for dermatological disorders. Fifty-five percent of respondents in the mail survey reported that they had noticed an increase. After skin problems, veterinarians in the survey ranked, in order, routine prophylactic care (22%), gastrointestinal disorders (8%), dental care (7%), urinary tract disorders (6%), cancer (4%) and nutrition counseling (4%) as categories for increasing patient visits.

Another finding of the study was that, of veterinarians responding, 71% saw themselves as specialists, with the most common areas of specialty being internal medicine, surgery and dermatology.

Regional differences among veterinarians were found to be negligible with one excep-
tion. A large percentage of veterinarians in the Mid-Atlantic region (71%) reported increases in dermatological visits compared to the national average of 55%. Overall, the data compiled indicated a marked uniformity in case load across the country. Nationally, the respondents indicated they spent a total of 55% of their time with dogs, 32% of their time with cats and 13% with all other animals.

Charles Banta, PhD, director of the Alpo Pet Center, said, “The survey underscores the need for more canine and feline dermatological research and points to the importance of continuing education in nutrition and gastrointestinal studies by practicing veterinarians.”

Colin Burrows, Vet Med, PhD, a member of the Alpo Veterinary Advisory Panel, agreed with Dr. Banta and added, “The recognition by pet owners of skin and gastrointestinal disorders will aid in early diagnosis and treatment by veterinarians.” Dr. Burrows is an Associate Professor of Medicine at the College of Veterinary Medicine, University of Florida in Gainesville.

The survey participants were drawn from the more than 24,000 small animal practitioners who receive Alpo’s quarterly veterinary professional newsletter, *Veterinary Clinical Briefs*. The survey was developed by the Alpo Veterinary Panel.