



Dr. Kaytee Firnett Devroy, right, owner of the Peshtigo Veterinary Clinic, checks on Mabel, a 4-year-old dog that came in for blood testing, while her owner, Taylor Wroblewski, left, looks on.

EAGLEHERALD/ERIN NOHA

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Vet shortage hits tri-cities

No new clients accepted amid growing need

ERIN NOHA
EagleHerald Staff Writer

PESHTIGO — COVID grabbed hold of the veterinary industry — and it hasn't let go.

"As the pandemic hit, the toll of costs, hours and stress really hit the veterinary profession," said Dr. Kaytee Firnett Devroy, owner of Peshtigo Veterinary. "The number of appointments in a day decreased while the demand for services went up."

The lack of veterinary care in the tri-cities could be leaving people without easily accessible services for their animals. Even though veterinarians are trying as hard as they can, the endless wheel of pet care keeps turning, leaving people wondering why they can't find a vet in the area. It's a vicious circle.

Currently, the area has three vets, Bayshore Veterinary Clinic in Menominee, Town

VETS & PETS

& Country Veterinary Clinic in Marinette and the Peshtigo Veterinary Clinic. None are accepting new clients.

"I would say right now the demand is definitely higher than the current availability," Firnett Devroy said.

Some people adopted cats and dogs during lockdown to pass the time. Those who already had pets were maybe noticing them like never before, trying to address their concerns. She believes this may have caused the extra

pressure on services.

As the vets adapted to curbside appointments and no-contact, they also noticed that the appointments took longer, she said. Extra sanitizing was a big part of that.

They saw their schedules piling up.

Early on, they paused non-essential services, Firnett Devroy said. They didn't do elective surgeries like spays, neuters and routine dental work for months.

"State officials were concerned about a lack of supplies

(masks/gloves) and asked for our profession to cut back in order to ensure human medicine had access," she said. "This further stressed pet owners and veterinary professionals."

Vets were restricted to only seeing very sick animals and not getting revenue from their elective procedures. At the same time, they watched supply costs skyrocket, she said.

And the appointments kept coming.

"During that time, many people left the field," Firnett Devroy said. "Veterinarians close to retirement retired early. Some younger veterinarians and support staff left for other careers because of the toll mentally and physically everything was taking on them."

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The problem is not just isolated to the tri-cities area. According to the American Veterinary Medical Association, “veterinarians saw fewer patients per hour and average productivity declined by almost 25% in 2020, compared with 2019.”

That means if a vet could usually see four pets in an hour, they'd only be able to see three.

The AVMA also noted that the average turnover for vets was twice as high compared to physicians in medical practice at 16%. Veterinary technicians had one of the highest turnovers, higher than registered nurses, with an approximately 26% annual turnover rate.

To solve the burnout, Fox Valley Technical College was approved to start a part-time vet tech program last fall. Still, the profession has a long way to go.

“What this has really brought to light is that our vet clinics are very busy,” said Dr. Lori Nagel, veterinary technician program director at Fox Valley Technical College in Appleton. “I think we can help, but on my end, I think it will be a long time before we'll say we've trained so many vet techs that they're really not needed. I think that need is going to be steady.”

Firnett Devroy agreed. “Obviously, these things help, but there is no instant fix,” she said.

The part-time curriculum takes three and a half years to complete, while the full-time track, which is at capacity, takes two years. Most part-time students work full-time at a clinic while attending school, Nagel said.

“We were trying to meet the need of our region — the programs available at that time were in the southern part of the state,” she said.

The State of Wisconsin has also updated its statutes to clarify what



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Mabel, a 4-year-old dog who came into Peshtigo Veterinary Clinic for blood testing, celebrates with a treat.

a veterinary technician can do — expanding many of their services and abilities in the telemedicine arena.

“They have the autonomy to do a lot with guidance from the veterinarian,” Nagel said. “Vet techs can bring a really good quality training in the surgical area. They can really increase what's happening in that clinic setting.”

The program costs about \$14,000 a year, Nagel said.

“The wages throughout the Midwest have been quite strong, probably spurred by this shortage,” she said.

Salaries still fall far outside what other medical professionals make, often less than half, comparing a general practice vet with a doctor and a veterinary technician versus a registered nurse, Firnett Devroy said.

Pay comes into play when veterinarians provide services outside of what they can do in a day.

“Veterinary medicine has always been a profession made up of people who love animals and want to help them,” Firnett Devroy said. “When you take that side of it and then have to add that the people working in the profession also need to make a living, it gets very hard and emotional.”

This happens when the clinic trims the nails on a cat for free or turns some full office visits into abbreviated ones if they

don't take as long.

“We've all done it because we want to help animals, but at the same time, that's the salary for an entire person,” Firnett Devroy said, commenting on lost revenue to keep the clinic running.

She said they hadn't taken any new clients in the past few years, which started before the pandemic.

“There are only so many hours in the day for us to see animals,” Firnett Devroy said.

If they took on new clients, they would be unable to help their established clients, which she said didn't seem fair.

“I think one of the most hurtful things that people in the field are told is, ‘You don't care about my pet. You're just in it for the money,’” she said. “I've known a lot of vets and a lot of technicians, assistants, receptionists. They are absolutely not in it for the money.”

Not One More Vet was created in 2014 to combat veterinarian suicide. According to studies gathered by the organization, veterinarians are 1.6 to 2.4 times more likely to die by suicide, while vet techs are even more likely at 2.3 to 5 times.

Many vets are forced to talk about money with clients when human nurses and doctors only need to talk about the medicine portion of things with their patients, Firnette Devroy said.

Those conversations, coupled with clients being asked to wait several weeks to months for surgeries due to too many pets or lack of staff, can be frustrating.

“That's incredibly hard,” Firnett Devroy said.

She advised that people call vets in Crivitz, Oconto and Oconto Falls to find a spot for their animals.

Erin Noha can be reached by email at enoha@eagleherald.com

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HEART FAILURE SURVIVAL CENTER OF AMERICA

Marinette
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Crivitz, WI 54114
715-854-7050

Q: How Does Dehydration Effect Our Body?

A: Water makes up two-thirds of the human body. Water helps in lubricating joints and eyes, flushes out toxins and waste, aids in digestion, and keeps skin healthy. Dehydration is typically caused by not drinking enough fluids to replace what fluid the body has lost. A number of factors can affect the severity of dehydration such as climate, a person's level of physical activity and diet. Thirst isn't always a reliable indicator of your body's need for water. Many people, especially older adults, don't feel thirsty until they are already dehydrated. It is very important to increase water intake when the weather is hot or if you are ill. Symptoms of dehydration in adults are extreme thirst, less frequent urination, dark-colored urine, fatigue, dizziness, and confusion.

Older Adults or people with Chronic illnesses, such as Diabetes and chronic kidney disease, have a high risk of becoming dehydrated. Many medications for chronic illnesses can increase the need for urination. Older Adults have a smaller reserve of water and their ability to conserve water is reduced as you age. People who work outside are at a higher risk when it is hot and humid out because sweat cannot easily evaporate and cool a person off as it normally does. This will cause the body temperature to increase and create a need for additional fluids. Infants and young children are mostly likely to develop high fevers, severe vomiting and diarrhea which can lead to dehydration. The

young also do not have the ability to say they are thirsty or get themselves a drink when needed.

Dehydration can have serious complications. People can get heat injury when they are active outside and perspiring heavily and do not drink enough fluids. Heat injury can range from mild symptoms like heat cramping or heat exhaustion to life threatening heatstroke. If a person experiences repeated episodes of dehydration it can lead to urinary and kidney problems such as urinary tract infections, kidney stones, and even kidney failure. Seizures can be common with dehydration as the lack of fluid can cause the electrolyte balance to get mixed up. Electrolytes such as potassium and sodium carry electrical signals to our cells and when the electrical signals are out of balance it can lead to involuntary muscle contractions.

Preventing Dehydration is the most important step. Let thirst be your first guide in preventing dehydration. If anyone starts to experience vomiting or diarrhea, start giving extra oral hydration as soon as the symptoms develop. If you have a strenuous day of activity planned, start drinking water first thing in the morning and continue to drink water well after you are finished with your activity. Producing lots of clear, dilute urine is a good indicator that you are properly hydrated. Minor illnesses such as bronchitis or bladder infections can easily lead to dehydration. If you are not feeling well make sure you are drinking extra fluids!



1809 Dunlap Ave., P.O. Box 77
MARINETTE, WI 54143
715-735-6611

ehextra.com

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Mark Lewis
Regional President,
APG Southern Wisconsin
mark.lewis@adamspg.com

Todd Colling
General Manager
tcolling@eagleherald.com

Dan Kitkowski
Senior Reporter
dkitkowski@eagleherald.com | 715-750-2103

Erin Noha
Reporter
enoha@eagleherald.com | 715-750-2105

Karyn Saemann
Regional Editor,
APG Southern Wisconsin
karyn.saemann@apg-sw.com

Brian O'Connor
Editor
boconnor@wdtimes.com

Matt Lehmann
Sports Reporter
mlehmann@eagleherald.com | 715-750-2113

Tricia Hurley
Sales Manager
thurley@eagleherald.com

CIRCULATION
Brian Hult, 715-750-2099
LeRoy Wood, 715-750-2112
subscriptions@eagleherald.com

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING
Judith Kline, 715-750-2109

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