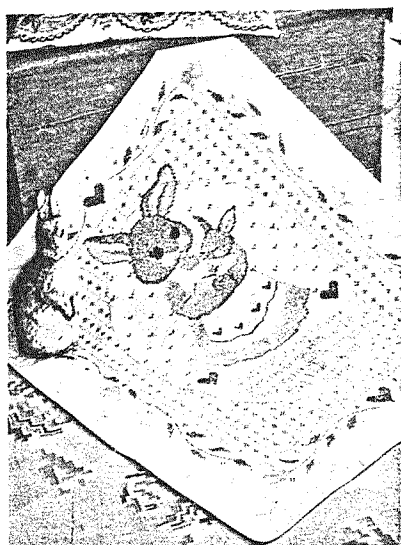




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surgery, dermatology, cardiology, oncology, ophthalmology, radiology, and anesthesiology. These specialists read both veterinary and human medical literature and have introduced into veterinary practice new techniques, equipment, drugs, and ideas.

A second force behind the new animal medicine is the rapid changes in medical technology itself. There are now 27 veterinary schools in the United States, all with teaching hospitals attached to them. In addition, there are private veterinary teaching hospitals in New York City and Boston. It's sometimes hard to distinguish these facilities from human hospitals.

Let's take a tour of my hospital, The Animal Medical Center in New York. The first stop is cardiology. There, several veterinarians are looking at X rays and electrocardiograms. The patient is a 17-year-old cat with an abnormal heart rhythm. The doctors place an ultrasound probe on the outside of the cat's chest. Harmless, invisible sound waves will allow them to look inside the heart itself.

Before the availability of ultrasound equipment, it would have been difficult to determine the kind of heart disease the cat had, and therapy would have been a guessing game. In this case, the heart problem is found to be caused by excessive thyroid hormone secreted by a thyroid tumor. The cat is treated with a single injection of radioactive iodine to destroy the tumor.

Down the hall, a three-year-old dog is being treated by the oncologists for lymphosarcoma, cancer of the lymph glands. The doctors are administering several chemotherapy drugs, as they have biweekly for the last 10 months. It has been eight months since there have been any symptoms.

(A diagnosis of cancer is never a good one. These days, however, there is a high likelihood of extensive remission with many types of tumors. So, if we can add one or two years of comfortable life for a pet with a normal life span of 10 to 12 years, we have achieved a major victory.)

As we walk into the surgery area, doctors are connecting a pacemaker directly into the beating heart of a Labrador retriever who had suddenly lost his ability to run or hunt. The diagnosis was heart block, causing his heart to beat too slowly to adequately pump blood. With the pacemaker, he should return to normal activity.

In another room, two surgeons are operating on a two-year-old German shepherd who was hit by a car. Both rear legs were broken, one into seven or

eight pieces. The best approach is to fit these pieces together so tightly that the dog will be able to walk on the leg while it is healing. To do this, the doctors use a large, stainless-steel plate and screws made by a Swiss medical company for human beings but adapted by veterinary surgeons for animal cases.

There are several doctors in intensive care examining a seven-foot-long boa constrictor. Yesterday, an intestinal blockage was corrected with a fiberoptic endoscope, a four-foot-long, thin instrument for viewing the inside of hollow organs. In this case, the equipment and patient bore a striking resemblance to each other!

There are some problems associated with the expanding capabilities of veterinary practice. Improved technology and increased specialization lead to increasing medical expenses. Some of the machines described earlier cost more than \$100,000. Newer, more effective drugs may cost 20 to 30 times what the older drugs cost.

The combination of higher costs and expanded treatment options sometimes forces both veterinarians and clients to make difficult choices. Take the example of a 15-year-old cat with kidney failure. The animal may respond to treatment and do very well for months to years. On the other hand, the cat may not respond to treatment and may live only for a few days to a few weeks. It will cost the owner several hundred dollars to find out which the result will be. What should be done?

Pet health insurance is one possible solution to these ethical and economic dilemmas, but such plans are still in their infancy. For insurance to work, a majority of pet owners would have to enroll their pets.

Another problem with the technology explosion in veterinary medicine is that it has not happened everywhere yet. People who live near a veterinary school or in a large metropolitan area have an advantage over those who do not.

Still, the face of private veterinary practice is changing, and referral and specialty practices are increasing every year. And as competition between medical-equipment manufacturers continues to drive prices down, presently unaffordable machinery will be available to private practitioners as well as large institutions.

In the meantime, researchers continue to work to adapt human-treatment technologies for animals—including total hip replacements, hearing aids, organ transplants for animals with kidney failure or diabetes, and new ways of treating cancer. The future holds encouraging possibilities for improving the health and prolonging the lives of all animals. ★