

The Ups: What Veterinarians and Technicians Love about their Jobs

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Abstract

Growing awareness about increasing numbers of professionals suffering from stress, addictions and suicidal ideation has resulted in an emphasis on “what’s wrong” with the professions and/or their members. In this session, we explore “what’s right” with veterinarians’ and technicians’ work experiences and what enables them and their work community to thrive. Both interview and survey data were used to identify the best parts of their work and what gives them the greatest satisfaction. These factors are examined in relation to positive wellness outcomes to see which are most beneficial to veterinarians’ and technicians’ well being.

Introduction

Much of the research on worker experiences looks at how to prevent work-related problems such as job stress, burnout or quit behavior. An alternate approach is to examine what contributes to positive work experiences that enhance worker potential and happiness. By examining what veterinarians and technicians love about their jobs, we can gain a better understanding of the subjective work experiences that may enhance their well being, their hope and optimism for the future, and their day-to-day happiness. This newsletter explores the positive aspects of veterinarians’ and technicians’ jobs that study participants identified as the best part of their jobs that give them the greatest job satisfaction.

Job satisfaction is defined as the degree to which workers enjoy their job. Job satisfaction has been linked to many positive outcomes for individuals, such as a greater sense of well being and contentment. It has also been linked to positive outcomes for the workplace, such as greater productivity and commitment to remain in their job or profession.

The Study

**March 2013
e-interviews**

- 7 veterinarians and 13 AHTS interviewed representing different practice settings in Alberta
- Questions asked them to describe a typical day, what they enjoy the most or gives them the greatest satisfaction and what they consider to be a "good day" at work
- e-interview findings used to construct survey

**April 2013
Survey**

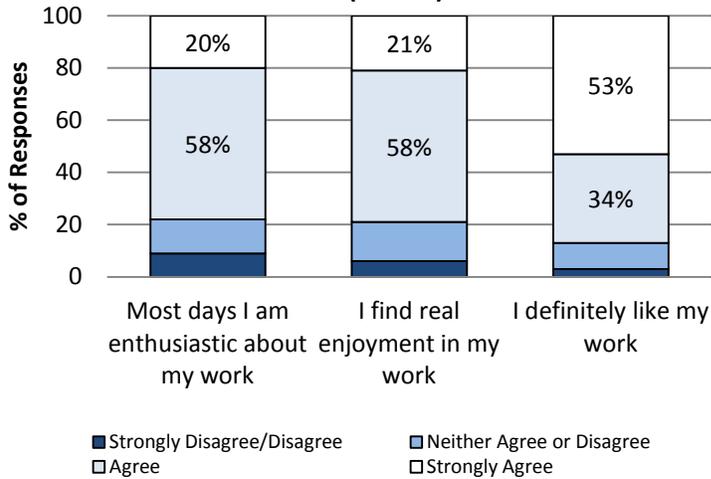
- 537 veterinarians and 453 AHTS submitted online ABVMA Member Wellness survey
- Survey measured job satisfaction, work experience
- Survey asked participants to list the three best things about their job

How Satisfied are They with their Work?

Table 1 shows the extent to which veterinarians and technicians are satisfied with their work. Most feel they are enthusiastic about their work most days (78%), they find real enjoyment in their work (79%) and they definitely like their work (87%). As one veterinarian wrote:

“I really enjoy doing my job. I love the work that I perform as a veterinarian. I love working with the patients and the clients. I love the physical nature of the job and traveling from call to call.”

Table 1. How Satisfied are You with Your Work? (N=829)



And a technician expressed her job satisfaction as follows:
“Working with the patients and their owners to improve their pet’s quality of life. Building rapport with the owners and working with a great team of individuals.”

Comparisons were made across a number of factors to see if any groups are significantly more satisfied than others. There were no statistically significant differences in the satisfaction scores for veterinarians vs. technicians, by supervisory status or job position, or by age group. There are too few men to

make meaningful gender comparisons for technicians, but the gender comparisons for veterinarians’ satisfaction scores showed no significant difference. While there was no significant differences in job satisfaction for veterinarians who work in clinic settings compared to those in other settings, technicians working in clinics reported significantly higher job satisfaction scores than those working in other settings.

What they Love about their Jobs

Both interview and survey data were used to identify the best parts of veterinarians and technicians work by asking them to describe what gives them the greatest job satisfaction. Four popular sources of enjoyment were identified that include: (1) making a difference by helping animals, (2) making a difference by helping clients, (3) having challenging interesting work, and (4) having supportive coworker relationships. Participants’ descriptions of these sources of job satisfaction are presented below. In addition, data from the survey provides frequency distributions of how often they experience these different aspects of their jobs.

Making a Difference by Helping Animals

Veterinarians and technicians alike identified making a difference in the lives of animals in terms of working with and helping animals as one of the most satisfying parts of their job. They described the enjoyment of caring for animals and making a difference in their quality of life. When asked to describe what they enjoy the most or gives them the greatest satisfaction in their job, some participants responded as follows:

“Helping animals live, longer healthy lives.”

“Contributing to healthy special relationships between people and their pets.”

“Promoting/emphasizing and protecting the human-animal bond.”

“When I am able to successfully help an animal improve their mobility and quality of life and their owners have more time to spend with them or are able to continue their activity of choice.”

“Knowing I’m doing something good in the world. Helping those who can’t help themselves.”

Table 2. How Often Do You Do Make a Difference Helping Animals in Your Work? (N=829)

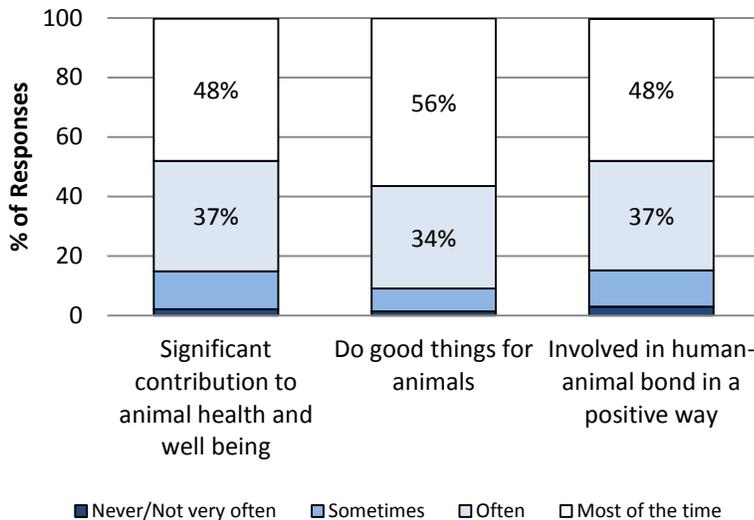


Table 2 presents the frequency distributions that show how often veterinarians and technicians feel that their work allows them to make a significant contribution to the health and well being of animals, to do good things for animals, and to be involved with the human-animal bond in a positive way. On average, about half of the respondents report they experience these different ways of making a difference and helping animals “most of the time” in their work and one third reported they experience them “often”.

Making a Difference by Helping Clients

Making a difference by helping clients was also identified as a source of satisfaction for many veterinarians and technicians. For example, they described how it is satisfying to get to know clients, to interact with them, and to educate and help them care for their animals and pets:

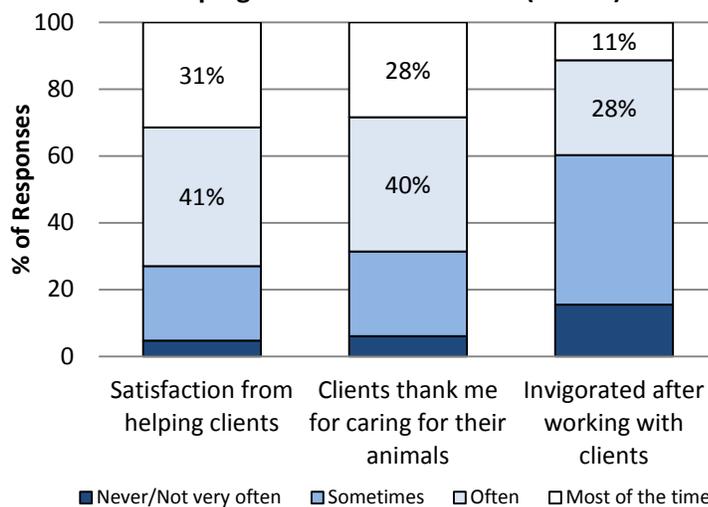
“The good days for me mostly come from the clients. Client reactions and interactions. I feel good “inside” and I feel appreciated.”

“Giving an answer to a client about a pet's ailment, good or bad, and seeing them understand.”

“Getting to know clients and their horses and becoming a part of their team, as well as the many friendships and relationships I have formed as a result of my work.”

“I love seeing the look on an owners face when their sick animal is better and they get to take them home. I like the feeling I get when I am able to I make a difference in people's and their pets lives.”

Table 3. How Often Do You Make a Difference by Helping Clients in Your Work? (N=829)



“The good clients that are truly appreciative for what I do here and never want me to leave. Being able to touch lots of lives in so many ways through what I do.”

“The ability to feel valued for the work that you do and the ability to help someone's best friend when they feel so helpless.”

Table 3 shows how often veterinarians and technicians feel they make a difference in their work by helping their clients. About three quarters (72%) feel satisfaction from helping their clients “often” or “most of the time” and about two thirds (68%) report that their clients regularly thank them for caring for their animals. One third (39%) regularly feel invigorated after working with clients.

Challenging Interesting Work

Challenging, interesting work was another popular theme regarding the most satisfying aspects of the job. Participants described how their work was never the same from one day to the next, how they enjoyed the variety of tasks, problems and/or animals they worked with, and how they are constantly learning new things and using different skills.

“Having a career that challenges me every day. Diagnosing and treating a medical issue that gives an animal better quality of life.”

“Work is always different... I'm always learning something new.”

“I get to use both my brain and my technical skills every day, I feel my work is stimulating.”

“Variety in my day to day work with new challenges to face and learn from. Constantly learning new skills and challenging myself.”

“Wide range in health care abilities I perform: nurse, pharmacy tech, medical imaging tech, dental hygienist, anesthesiologist, lab tech, etc. I enjoy the change and variety.”

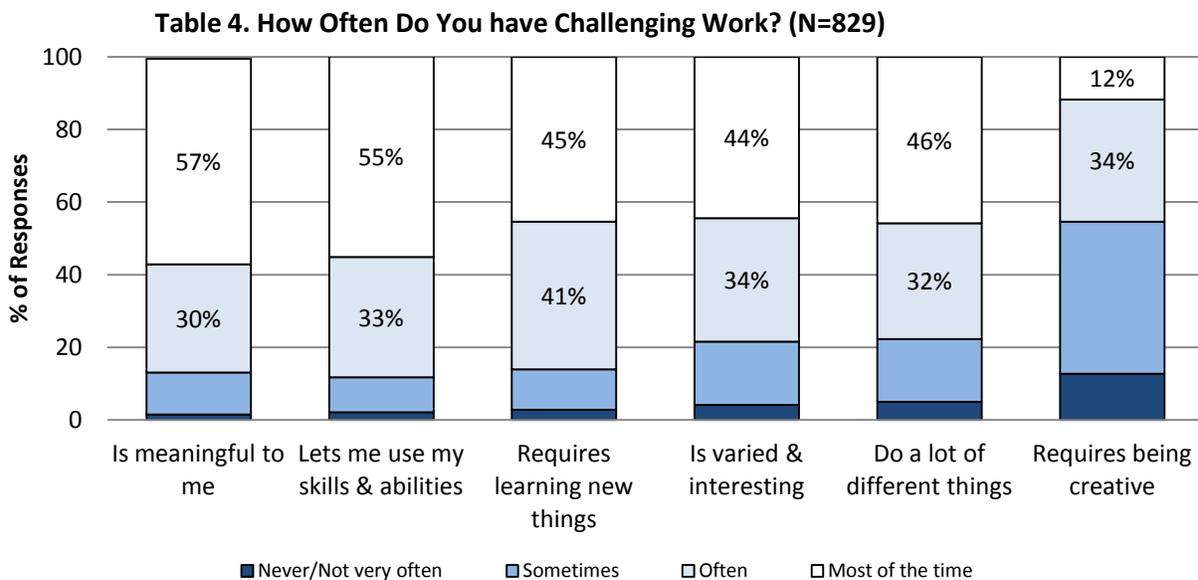


Table 4 shows how often veterinarians and technicians experience challenging, interesting varied work. More than half feel that most of the time their work is meaningful (57%) or that it lets them use their skills and abilities (55%). Almost half feel that most of the time their work requires that they learn new things (45%), is varied and interesting (44%) or involves doing a lot of different things (46%). Far fewer report that they are regularly required to be creative in their work.

Supportive Coworkers

Lastly, participants described how important their relationships with coworkers are in making their job enjoyable. The explained how having good people to work with who supported one another was key to enjoying work. Some of their descriptions are as follows:

"I enjoy when I have accomplished or completed tasks and when I see co-workers doing well and enjoying themselves. I work with great people."

"Surround myself with people who care about animals as much as I do."

"Working and collaborating with like-minded, dedicated colleagues."

"Working with other compassionate people with a passion for animals."

"Having the "work" family that I do."

"Freedom to share your opinion about the medical care of a patient."

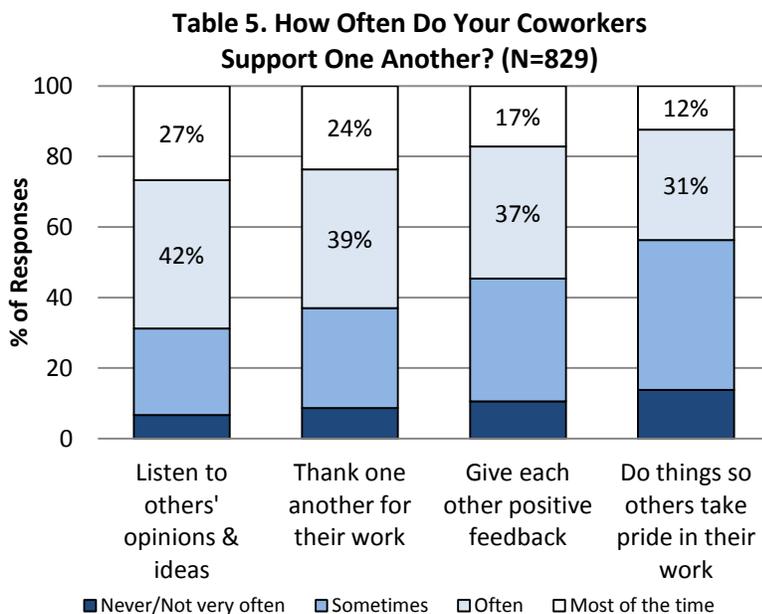


Table 5 shows how often veterinarians and technicians feel supported by the people they work with. About two-thirds of participants indicate that their coworkers regularly listen to each others' opinions and ideas (69%) or thank one another for their work (63%). About half (54%) report that their coworkers give each other positive feedback often or most of the time. Slightly less than half (43%) report that their coworkers regularly do or say things so that others are proud of their work.

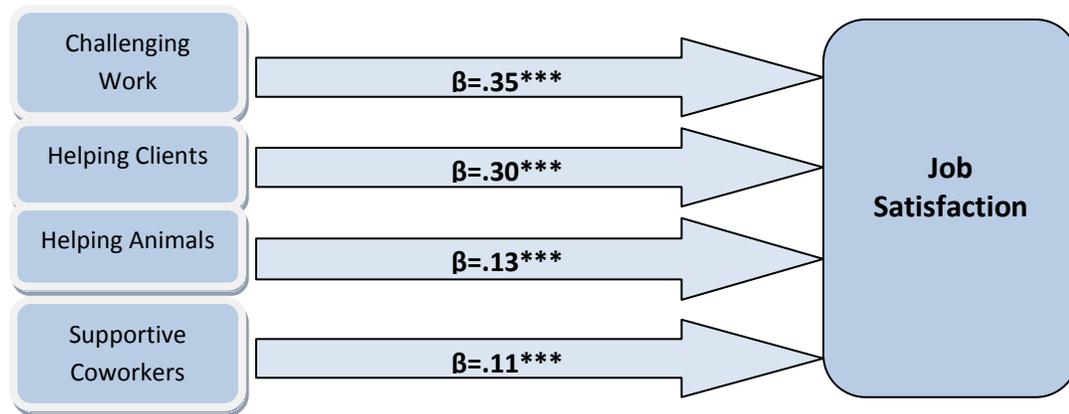
How Do these Factors Relate to Job Satisfaction?

The items listed in the tables above were summed to compute mean scores for each of the factors identified as relevant to veterinarians and technicians' job satisfaction. These factors were then simultaneously entered into a multivariate regression analysis. This allows us to determine the relative contribution of each factor to job satisfaction, net of each other and net of the control variables also included in the analysis. Figure 1 shows the relative contribution of each factor to veterinarians' and technicians' job satisfaction.

Figure 1 shows that challenging interesting work is the most important determinant of job satisfaction for veterinarians and technicians. That is, the more challenging and interesting their work, the most satisfied they are with their job. This is closely followed by making a difference by helping clients, which

also contributes to greater job satisfaction. Helping animals is third in importance of these four factors, where the more time spent helping animals is related to greater job satisfaction. Lastly, a good work environment, in terms of supportive coworkers, is also important in increasing job satisfaction.

Figure 1. Relative Importance of Key Factors to Job Satisfaction



*Note: The coefficients represent standardized regression coefficients (β) while controlling for occupation (veterinarian vs. technician), workplace (works in clinic vs. other), city size, marital status, parental status and age.
 ***p > .001; **p > .01; *p > .01*

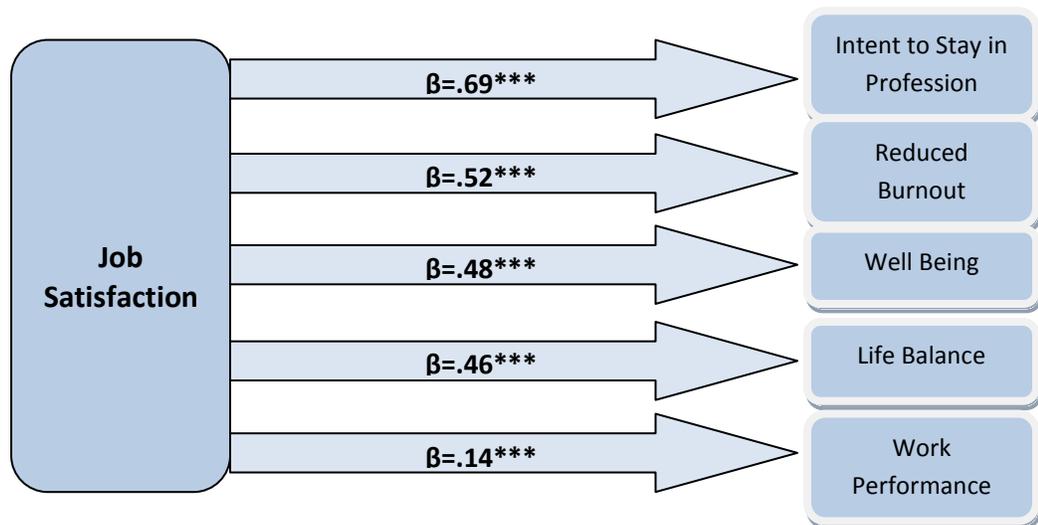
How Does Job Satisfaction Relate to Key Outcomes?

A similar approach was used to determine the relative importance of job satisfaction to five key outcomes. The outcomes include three that are particularly relevant to individual veterinarians' and technicians' well being including: burnout, well being and life balance. The other two are relevant to the workplace including: whether the individual intends to stay in the profession and work performance.

Figure 2 shows the relative importance of job satisfaction to the five key outcomes. Of the five outcomes, job satisfaction has the strongest relationship with intent to stay in the veterinary or technician professions. That is, those who are more satisfied with their jobs are significantly more likely to intend to remain working in their current occupation.

Job satisfaction is also strongly related to the three individual outcomes -- burnout, well being and life balance. Veterinarians and technicians who are more satisfied with their jobs experience significantly less burnout and a significantly greater sense of well being and life balance. While not as strongly related as the other factors, it appears that work performance is also enhanced by job satisfaction. Those who enjoy their work more also report that the quality and performance of their work is higher than other workers in their line of work.

Figure 2. Relative Importance of Job Satisfaction on Key Outcomes



Note: The coefficients represent standardized regression coefficients (β) while controlling for occupation (veterinarian vs. technician), workplace (works in clinic vs. other), city size, marital status, parental status and age.
***p > .001; **p > .01; *p > .01

Summary Points

- **Most veterinarians and technicians are highly satisfied with their work** as indicated by the degree to which they are enthusiastic about their work and find enjoyment in doing it. There are almost no differences across a variety of individual and work arrangement characteristics.
- **Making a difference by helping animals and clients, challenging interesting work, and supportive coworker relationships were identified as key sources of job satisfaction** in the open ended questions. All four factors were statistically significantly related to job satisfaction.
- **Challenging interesting work and making a difference by helping clients** were more strongly related to job satisfaction than helping animals or having supportive coworkers.
- **Job satisfaction appears very important in retaining veterinarians and technicians** in their respective professions, as well as **enhancing a sense of well being and life balance and reducing burnout**. Job satisfaction is also important in enhancing work performance.

The Last Word

"I have always wanted to be a Veterinarian and feel blessed to have fulfilled that dream and aspiration. There can be difficult days as in any job, but the most important factor I can feel happy about -- if I could do over -- I would not change a thing -- I would still be a Veterinarian! I feel blessed and privileged to be part of this profession."

"Being an AHT is the most rewarding career - it is diverse and there is always something to learn. At times it can be stressful but at the end of the day you still have accomplished good things be it saving a life or making a client feel good or teaching a new staff member something new!"

The Downs: What Stresses Veterinarians and Technicians Out

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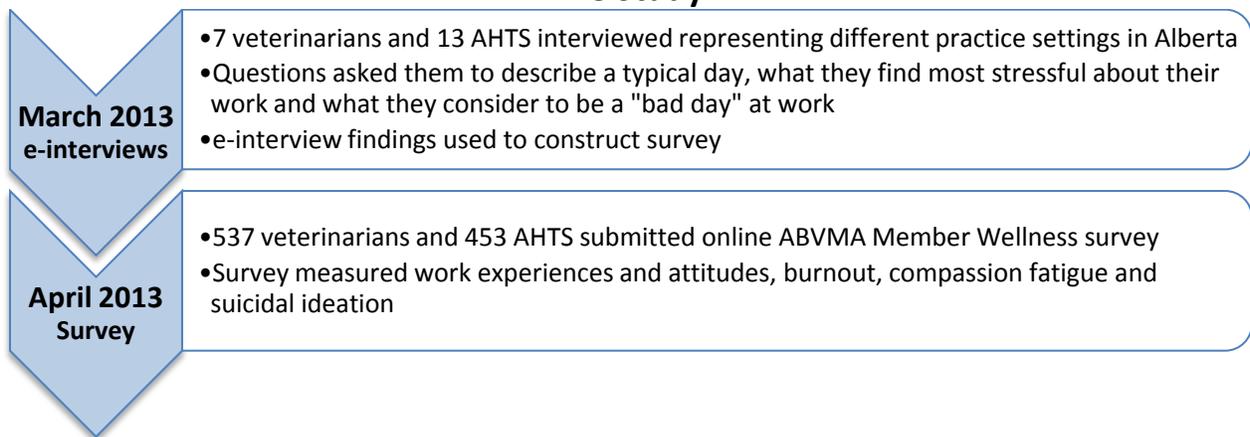
Abstract

All jobs have stressful moments and this paper explores the unique factors that are particularly stressful to veterinarians and animal technicians. While some stressors may seem obvious, others may be more subtle but still harmful to wellness. Both interview and survey data were used to identify stressful parts of veterinarians' and technicians' work. Several popular wellness outcomes, such as burnout, compassion fatigue and suicidal ideation, are examined in relation to these stressors to see which are particularly harmful and in what ways.

Introduction

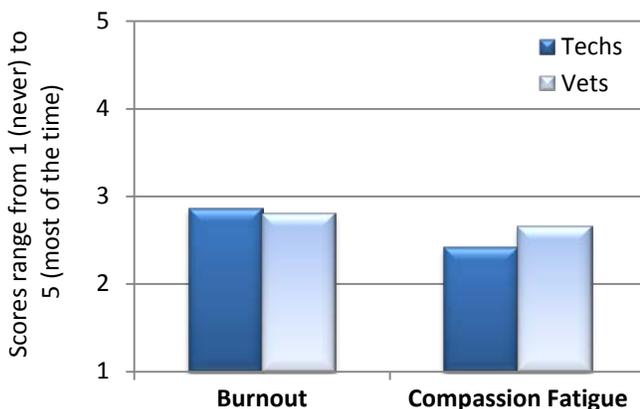
Veterinarian wellness is receiving more attention in both the practice and academic arenas where it is being documented that more and more veterinarians are suffering from compassion fatigue, burnout, and suicidal behaviors. Several studies have been carried out in Australia, Europe and the United States that identify factors related to these indicators of unwellness among veterinarians. Very few studies have examined these issues among Canadian veterinarians. While veterinarian wellness is receiving more attention in both the practice and academic arenas, scant if any research has examined the work experiences of animal health technicians.

The Study



Indicators of Wellness

Table 1. Technicians' (N=407) & Veterinarians' (N=437) Burnout & Compassion Fatigue Scores

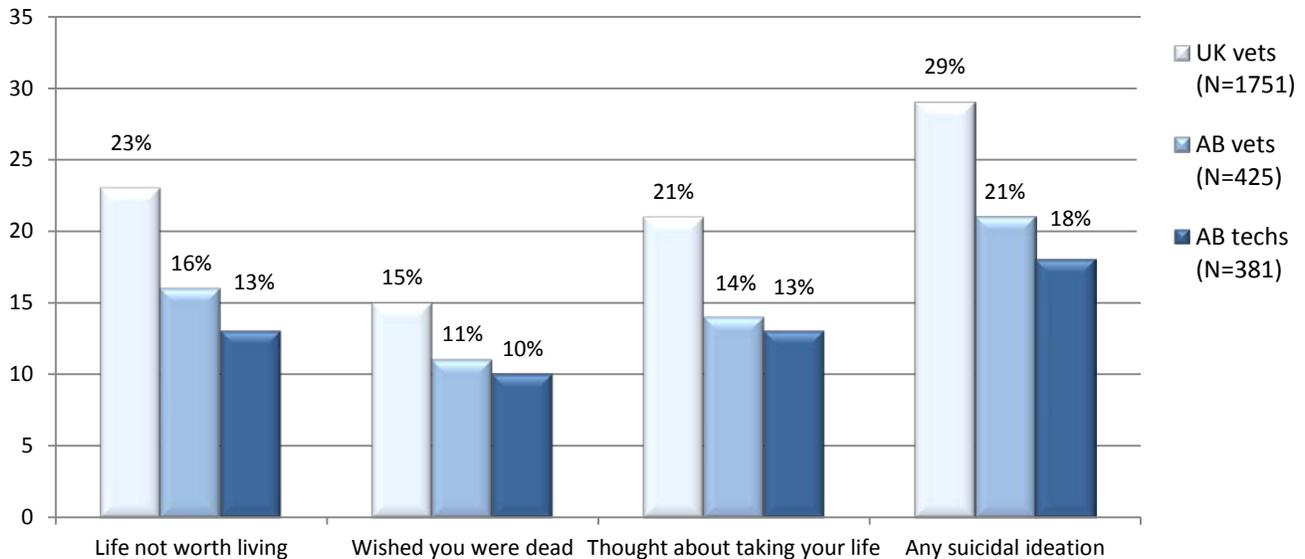


The paper focuses on three different wellness outcomes: burnout, compassion fatigue and suicidal ideation. **Burnout** refers to feeling emotionally overextended and drained as a result of one's work. It was measured by five items that reflect how often veterinarians and technicians feel emotionally drained, used up, tired or burned out from their work. **Compassion fatigue** refers to caregivers' reduced ability or interest in being empathic or being able to bear the suffering of their clients. It was measured by seven items indicating how often veterinarians and technicians share the emotional pain or traumatic stress of their patients and/or clients, and feel affected, preoccupied or depressed because of it. Table 1 shows that technicians and

veterinarians do not differ in how often they experience feelings of burnout, but veterinarians report feeling symptoms of compassion fatigue slightly more often than technicians.

Suicidal ideation refers to suicidal thoughts that are the immediate precursors to planning and carrying out suicide attempts. Suicidal ideation was measured by three items from Bartram’s study of UK veterinarians asking whether they felt the following over the last 12 months: life was not worth living? wished you were dead? or thought about taking your life, even if you would not really do it? Table 2 shows the percent who responded “yes” for Alberta veterinarians and technicians and UK veterinarians.

Table 2. Comparison of Suicidal Ideation among AB Veterinarians and AB Technicians and UK Veterinarians



The results show that similar proportions of Alberta veterinarians and technicians have had some suicidal thoughts in the past year: 21% of veterinarians and 18% of technicians have thought life was not worth living, wished they were dead or thought about taking their own life. This is comparable to the results of the 2012 CVMA National Survey on veterinarian wellness that reported 19% of their respondents had seriously thought about suicide. The results for Alberta veterinarians and technicians are significantly lower than the 29% of the UK veterinarians who had such thoughts over the past year. It is important to note, however, that 21% of Alberta veterinarians represents 294 of the 1401 practicing at the time of the study and 18% of Alberta technicians represents 222 of the 1234 practicing at that time, which is perhaps a timely call for action.

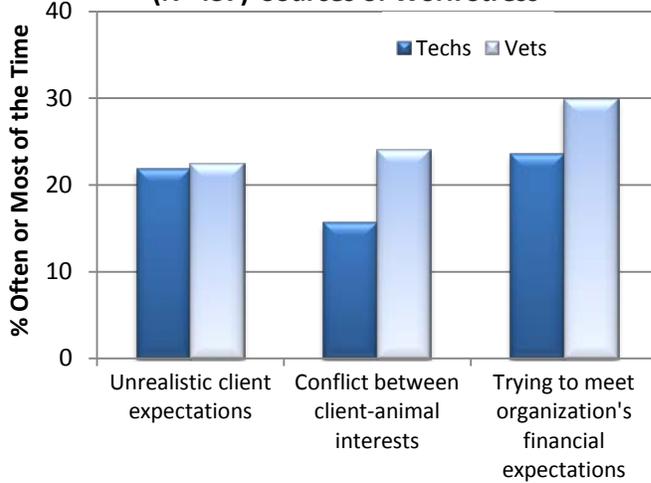
Sources of General Work Stress

A series of work characteristics have been identified as stressful in other research and in the interviews of this study. These factors were measured in the online survey. The tables show the percent who regularly encounter these situations as indicated by their responses that they experience them “often” or “most of the time”.

- **About 20% of both technicians and veterinarians regularly experience unrealistic client expectations** (see Table 1). As two veterinarians noted:
“Clients with unrealistic expectations are difficult to deal with. Clients who “researched it on-line” and “know” what their pet has.”

“People have an unrealistic perception about the economics of veterinary medicine and try to hold their veterinarians responsible when we fail to live up to their (often misguided) expectations.”

Table 3. Technicians' (N=407) & Veterinarians' (N=437) Sources of Work Stress



A technician working in a rural mixed practice described a stressful parts of her job is as: *"The increasing demands of the public for instant service while they challenge you with Dr Google..."*

- **Conflict between client interests and what is best for the animal is a regular source of stress**, particularly for veterinarians. For example: *"Clients that want us to help the pet for free, and blame us for costs of health care."*
- **Trying to meet the financial expectations of the employing organization is stressful**, especially for veterinarians. Two

veterinarians describe financial issues as the most stressful part of their work:

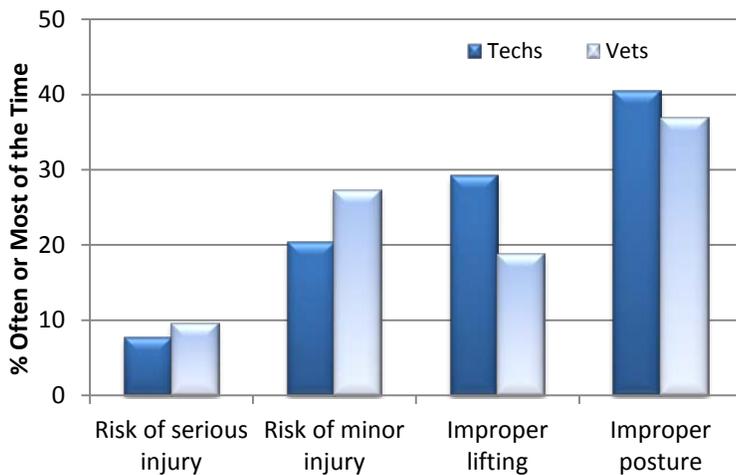
"Dealing with financial/business management issues that I have no training in. Dealing with rising costs, rent and an aging clinic with a half-million dollar business loan and tens of thousands of dollars in student loans as well."

"Low revenue day (especially when you feel like you have been working your ass off all day)."

Health Risks

Table 4 shows some of the health risks that AHTs and veterinarians encounter in their work.

Table 4. Technicians' (N=407) & Veterinarians' (N=437) Health Risks During Work Week



- **Few technicians and veterinarians are regularly at risk of serious injury, but one-quarter are regularly at risk of minor injury.**

"A few years ago due to a work place injury I had to not only leave the job I loved, but potentially change careers completely."

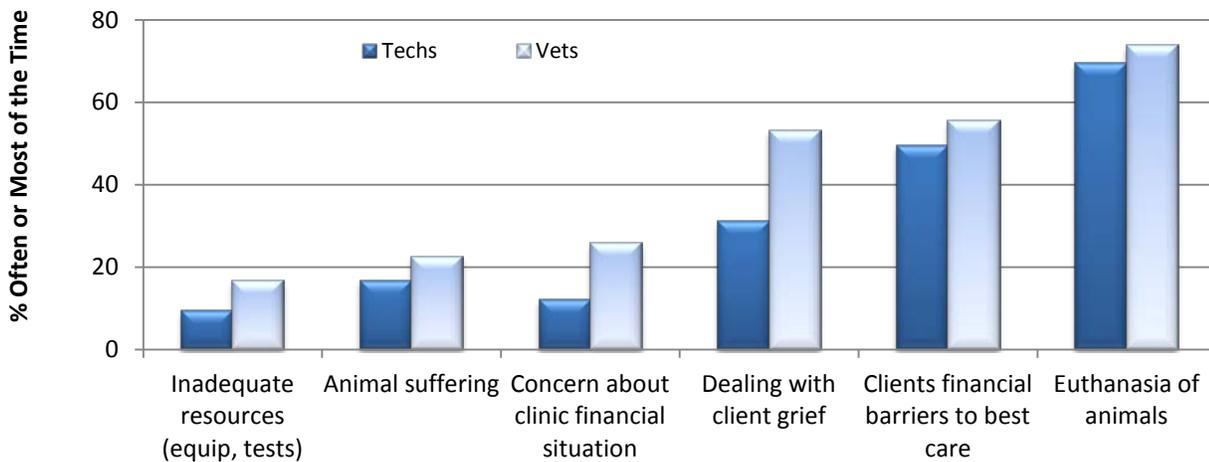
"Numerous staff have been injured by bulls upon semen testing, restraint and proper care of companion animals has been below an acceptable level... and in the end, those were among deciding reasons why I left in pursuit of learning more about animals in a happier, healthier environment."

- **Almost half of both groups regularly report improper posture, but more technicians report improper lifting.**

Clinic-Specific Work Stress

In the survey, technicians and veterinarians reported on how often they experience specific work stressors relevant to working with clinical cases. Table 5 shows work stressors related to animal care, finances and clients.

Table 5. Technicians' (N=279) & Veterinarians' (N=393) Clinic Work Stressors



- **Veterinarians more regularly have concerns about the financial situation of clinic and inadequate resources than technicians.** Two veterinarians wrote:

“When I was an associate, I only had the stress of patient outcomes (and the aforementioned mistakes). As an owner, I have HR and financial stress as well. The HR and financial stresses comes in waves but when they are bad, they are really bad.”

“Finances are usually part of most stress – it drives client responses to situations, it complicates practicing the way we want too, it is a problem for new graduates, it affects our options in staffing, products, equipment, continuing education, working environment etc.”

- **Relatively few technicians and veterinarians report that they regularly encounter animal suffering, but about 70% of both groups regularly deal with euthanasia of animals.** For example:

“I drove home crying tonight as I was upset about a case of mine that was euthanized but I still love my job.”

“I had to stop working as a veterinarian because euthanasia bothered me so much. It would upset me for day/weeks. Still does. I do much better as a manager and am much happier.”

- **Veterinarians more regularly deal with client grief than AHTs.** As one veterinarian wrote:

“Euthanizing animals has become very stressful, some CE on how to deal with grief would be beneficial.”

- **About half of technicians and veterinarians regularly find clients’ financial situation is a barrier to best care for their animals** (Table 5). Both raised this concern in the e-interviews as being particularly stressful:

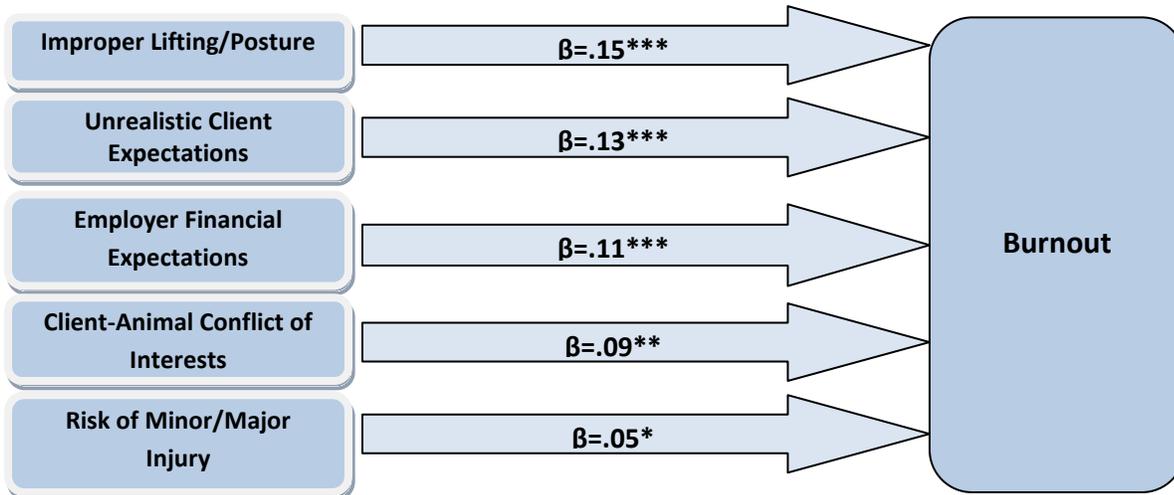
“Frustrating clients that can’t treat due to lack of money or just not caring about their pet.”

“I find it stressful when a client cannot afford something that I feel would benefit their animal(s). I feel “guilty” if I know there is something I can do to help them but they cannot afford it and I cannot afford to do it pro bono. I know that I undervalue some of the things we do so I stay away from the billing side of things.”

How Do these Factors Relate to Burnout?

The items in the tables above were simultaneously entered into a multivariate regression analysis. This determines the relative contribution of each factor to burnout, net of each other and the control variables included in the analysis. Figure 1 shows the relative contribution of each factor to veterinarians' and technicians' burnout. The health risk of improper lifting or posture appears to be an important contributor to burnout, followed by unrealistic client expectations and trying to meet the financial expectations of the employing organization. The more often animal health care workers experience conflict between client and animal interests also contributes to burnout. Lastly, risk of injury at work is also significantly related to burnout.

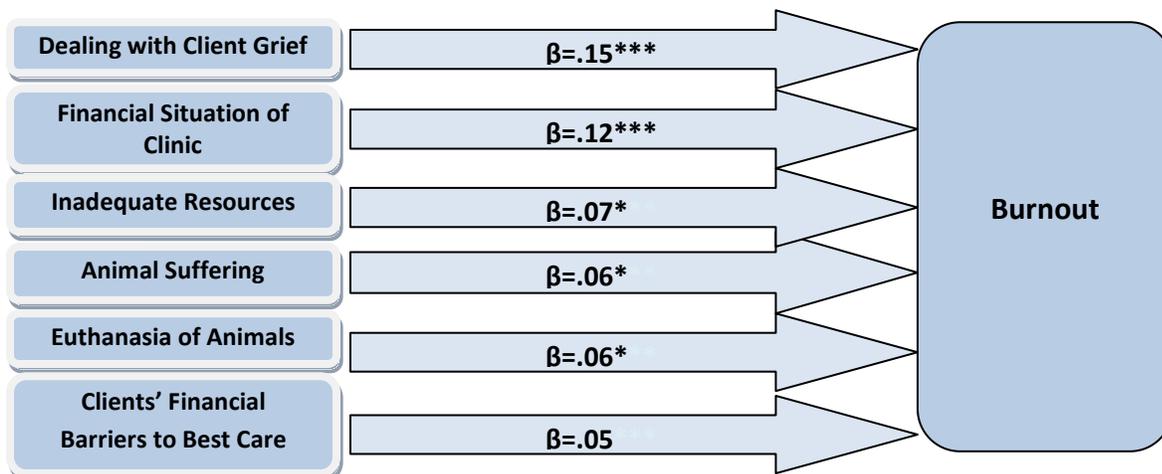
Figure 1. Relative Importance of General Work Stressors and Health Risks to Burnout



Note: The coefficients represent standardized regression coefficients (β) while controlling for occupation (veterinarian vs. technician), workload, work support, pay satisfaction, work setting (works in clinic vs. other), city size, marital status, parental status and age. ***p > .001; **p > .01; *p > .01

Figure 2 is limited to veterinarians and technicians working in clinical settings. Dealing with client grief and concern about the financial situation of the clinic are both important contributors to burnout. Inadequate resources in terms of lack of equipment or ability to perform certain tests are also significant. While animal suffering and euthanasia significantly contribute to burnout, having clients with financial barriers to best care for their animal is not significantly related.

Figure 2. Relative Importance of Clinic-Specific Work Stressors to Burnout

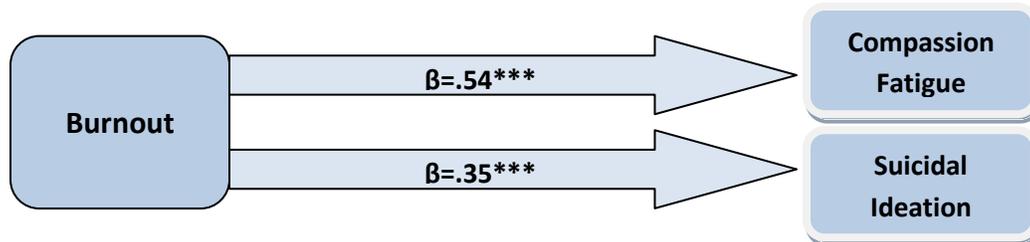


Note: The coefficients represent standardized regression coefficients (β) while controlling for occupation (veterinarian vs. technician), workload, work support, pay satisfaction, city size, marital status, parental status and age. ***p > .001; **p > .01; *p > .01

How Does Burnout Relate to Compassion Fatigue and Suicidal Ideation?

A similar analytic approach was used to determine the relative importance of burnout to compassion fatigue and suicidal ideation. Figure 3 shows that feelings of burnout are significantly related to both compassion fatigue and suicidal ideation. That is, those who are more emotionally exhausted with their jobs more report experiencing compassion fatigue and suicidal ideation.

Figure 3. Relative Importance of Burnout on Compassion Fatigue and Suicidal Ideation



Note: The coefficients represent standardized regression coefficients (β) while controlling for occupation (veterinarian vs. technician), workload, work support, pay satisfaction, work setting (works in clinic vs. other), city size, city size, marital status, parental status and age. *** $p > .001$; ** $p > .01$; * $p > .01$

Summary

- It is important to understanding the factors that lead to burnout given the strong relationships between burnout and compassion fatigue and suicidal ideation.
- Physical strain, client expectations and interests, and financial demands are all relevant to veterinarians' and technicians' feelings of burnout and fairly frequently experienced by many animal health care workers.
- Clinical workers are more likely to burnout from dealing with client grief and financial stresses, but inadequate resources and animal suffering and euthanasia are also important factors.
- Based on the findings of this paper, some of the factors leading to burnout may be effectively reduced in the workplace and these are identified below.

TO REDUCE BURNOUT...

- **Reduce the physical stressors by:**
 - Promoting **proper lifting and posture** habits and equipment.
 - Exploring ways to **reduce risk of injury** in the workplace.
- **Reduce the client/patient stressors by:**
 - Promoting **effective communication with clients** about realistic expectations, animal welfare and animal care costs.
 - Accessing **grief counseling** for clients and animal health care workers.
- **Reduce the financial stressors by:**
 - Promoting **effective communication** about **realistic financial expectations** between employees and employers.
 - Accessing **financial planning resources** for clinics and office managers.

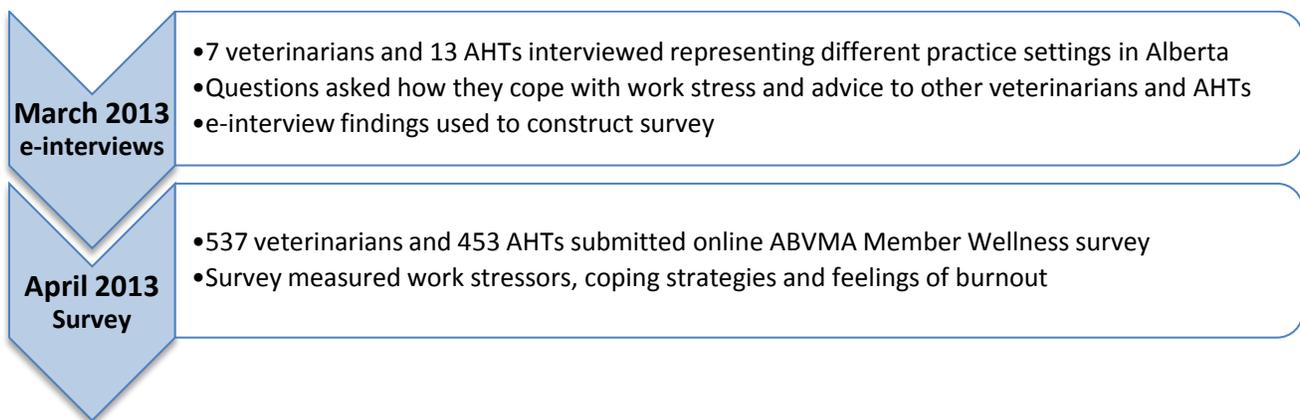
Maintaining Momentum: How Veterinarians and Technicians Cope

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Abstract

Veterinarians and animal technicians encounter numerous stressors in their work. In dealing with work-related stress, they may use a variety of coping strategies. Unfortunately, not all coping strategies may be effective in reducing feelings of stress and some may actually be more harmful than beneficial. Veterinarians' and technicians' own descriptions of the coping strategies that they use are presented in addition to statistical data that show how often they typically use these strategies. How these coping strategies are related to feelings of emotional exhaustion are examined to illustrate which may be beneficial and which may be harmful in dealing with work-related stress.

The Study



How Do You Cope?

When asked to describe how they cope with work-related stress, veterinarians and technicians described a number of different strategies in the e-interviews that reflect different coping responses.

- **At work, cope by calming down, trying to relax, or turning to colleagues for help.** Calming down may involve taking a break or time out or talking to a co-worker. Here are examples of ways veterinarians and technicians attempt to calm down, take a break or relax while at work:
"I try to take a moment to myself and regroup and "pull it together" if you will. Whether I run across the street to [gas station] to get a drink, listen to music, or look at something else that is unrelated to my stressor for a few minutes."

"I try to make the best of it. Will sometimes take a break and go outside for some fresh air. I always go home at lunch time which makes the day seem less long. I will talk to a co-worker about my issue and vent a bit."

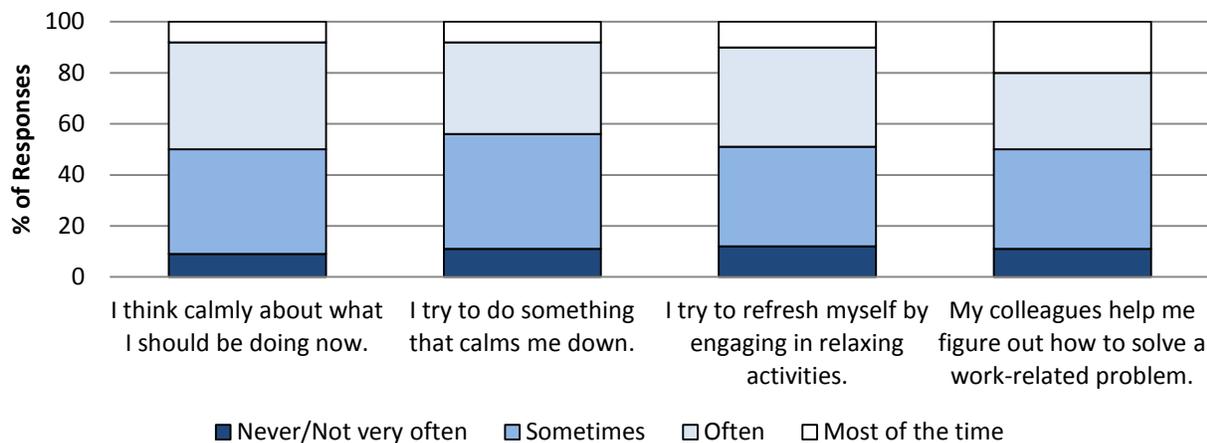
"Taking a break, having a coffee, reading the paper -- can also be helpful to cope."
- Talking to co-workers and seeking their opinions or help is another strategy used to cope with stress.
"I will discuss it with the office staff. I will take a deep breath. I will think of what is important in life and put things in their proper perspective."

“The rest of the staff is supportive, we have the same concerns. We vent to each other and try to support each other.”

“I think it’s so important to talk about what happened, don’t lay blame, give reassurance, identify the mistake and get it out there.”

Table 1 presents the results from the survey data that shows the frequency with which respondents use four different strategies in dealing with work-related stress that are similar to those described in the e-interviews. All are fairly popular coping strategies in that almost half of respondents report using them “sometimes” and about one third report using them “often”. One-fifth of veterinarians and technicians also report that their colleagues help them to figure out how to solve a work-related problem “most of the time”.

Table 1. How Often Do You Do the Following in Dealing with Work-Related Stress? (N=805)



- **After work, two popular coping strategies are physical exercise and spending time with family.**

“Workout, spend time with my family.”

“I play agility with my dogs or take them for a walk.”

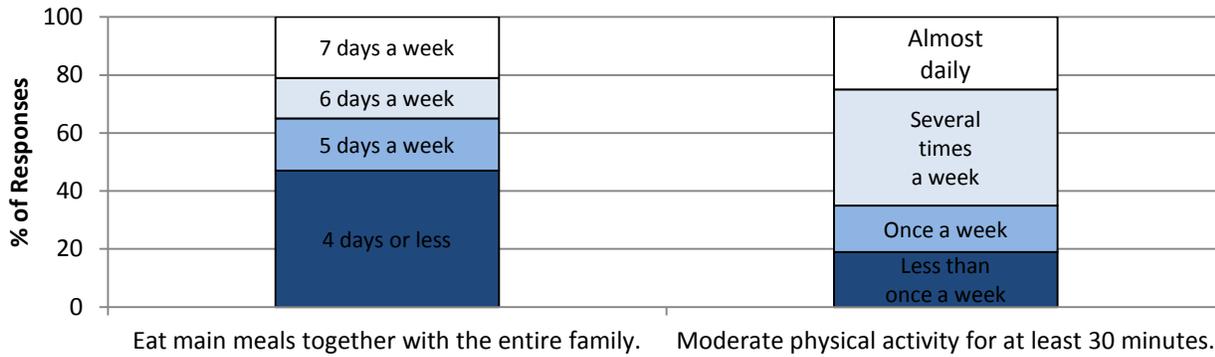
“I spend time with my husband and my dogs. I go for a walk with my dogs. I drink wine or eat sweets although I have adopted a better diet and that makes a huge difference in my mental state and energy level.”

“Watch TV and have a glass of rum!!! Go golfing. Talk to my wife. Phone my grandchildren and talk to them!! Take my dog for a long walk.”

“Exercising is good.”

Table 2 shows the survey results where slightly more than half of the respondents usually eat dinner with their family most days of the week (i.e., five or more days a week). Table 2 also shows that 25% exercise almost daily and almost half (40%) several times a week in moderate physical activities for at least 30 minutes.

Table 2. How Often Do You Do the Following?



- Internalization of stress** is also a popular response described in the e-interviews. This may involve ignoring the stress and trying to work through it, or keeping it to one’s self and not talking about it with others.

“Work harder... shrug and move on.”

“I may or may not tell my family. I usually keep it in and may talk about it later.”

“Just push through – no sense in getting stuck on things and deal with it with whatever means you have available.”

“I internalize it so that the staff and clients don’t see that there are issues and to keep everyone happy and keep things moving along... Sometimes internalize so my family does not have to hear about. Sometimes I let loose and vent about it to my wife.”

Table 3 shows different internalization strategies and that keeping it to themselves is the most popular of the four in this table, where 25% keep it to themselves “often” or “most of the time” and almost half (43%) “sometimes”. Almost half (42%) “sometimes” carry on as if nothing has happened with 18% doing this “often” or “most of the time”.

Table 3. How Often Do You Do the Following in Dealing with Work-Related Stress? (N=805)

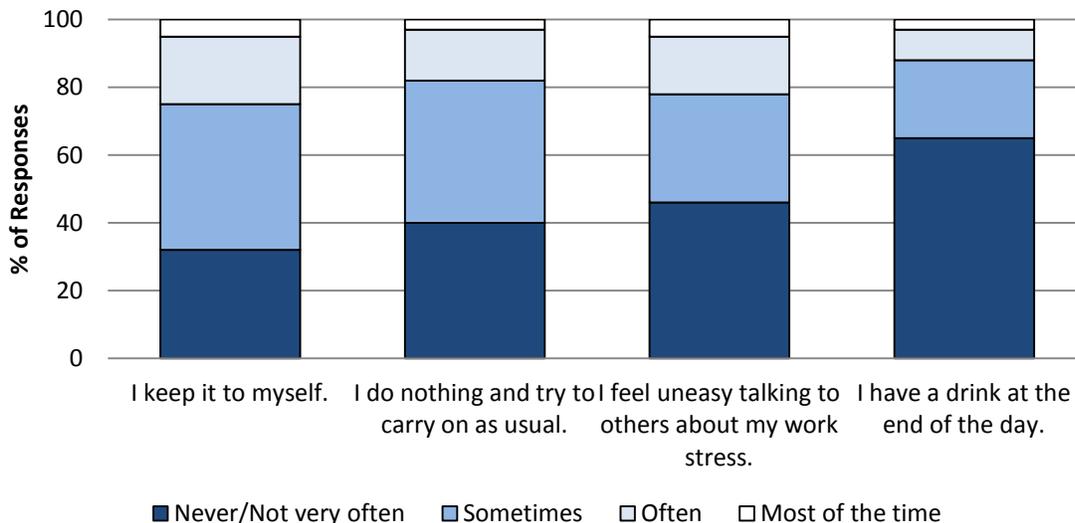


Table 3 shows that one third of veterinarians and AHTs (32%) “sometimes” feel uneasy about talking about their work related stress with others and 22% feel this way “often” or “most of the time”. The majority of (65%) report that they “never” have a drink at the end of the day in coping with work stress, but one quarter (23%) report that they do this “sometimes” and the remainder (12%) report doing this “often” or “most of the time”.

How Do These Coping Strategies Relate to Burnout?

In the survey, burnout was measured by a five item scale that assesses how often veterinarians and AHTs experience the following: I feel emotionally drained from my work; I feel used up at the end of the workday; I feel tired when I get up and have to face another day on the job; I feel that working all day is really a strain for me; and I feel burned out from my work. Responses were summed and averaged to get an overall burnout score that ranges from 1 (low burnout) to 5 (high burnout).

To determine the relationship between each of the coping strategies and burnout, zero-order correlations were computed. The correlation (r) indicates the direction and magnitude of the relationship between each coping strategy and burnout. All of the correlations presented below are statistically significant. A negative correlation means that the more frequently that coping strategy is used, the less often they feel burned out. This means the coping strategy is effective in that it reduces feeling of burnout. A positive correlation means that the more frequently veterinarians and AHTs use that coping strategy, the more often they experience symptoms of burnout. This means it is a harmful coping strategy.

Coping Strategies That May Help

Below are the six coping strategies that appear effective in reducing feelings of burnout. These strategies may be used at work by taking a time out or short break, having a cup of coffee, or talking to colleagues.

- Think calmly about what to do (r=-.30)
- Try to refresh self by relaxing activities (r=-.19)
- Do something that calms me down (r=-.11)
- Colleagues help solve work problem (r=-.32)

After leaving work, the more main meal times that veterinarians and AHTs spend with their family and the more frequently they exercise, the less often they feel burned out from their work.

- Eat main meal with entire family (r=-.31)
- Exercise several times a week (r=-.25)

Figure 1 shows how spending meal time with family significantly reduces burnout. Figure 2 shows how moderate physical activity is most beneficial when veterinarians and technicians exercise at least several times a week.

Figure 1. Burnout and Number of Meals with Family (N=256)*

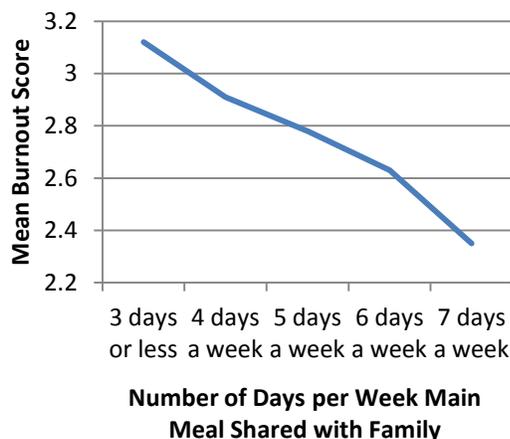
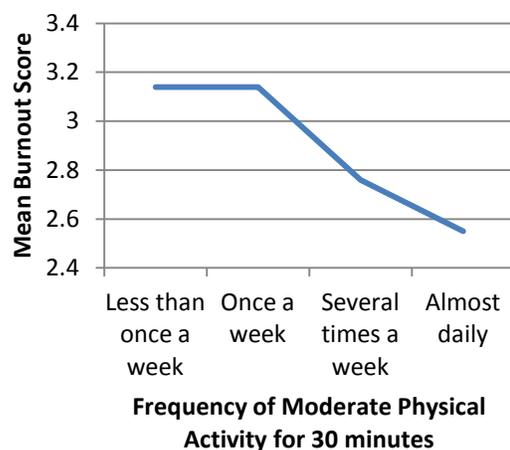


Figure 2. Burnout and Frequency of Physical Activity (N=789)



Coping Strategies That May Hurt

The four internalization strategies used to cope with work stress may be harmful because they are correlated with *increased* feelings of burnout. That is, keeping it to one's self, doing nothing, and not talking to others all appear to contribute to feeling more burned out from one's work.

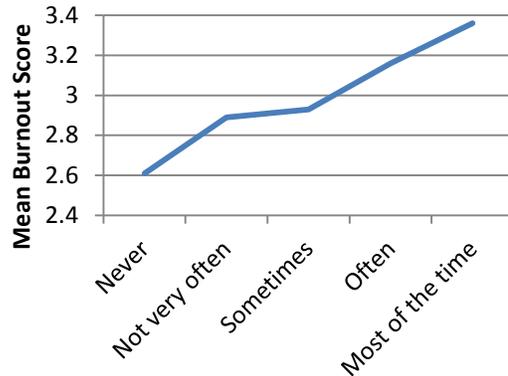
- Keep it to myself ($r=.25$)
- Do nothing and carry on as usual ($r=.25$)
- Feel uneasy talking to others ($r=.33$)

In addition, it appears that having a drink at the end of the day to cope with work-related stress is also harmful to veterinarians' and technicians' wellbeing.

- Have a drink at the end of the day ($r=.21$)

Figure 3 shows that the more often veterinarians and AHTs have a drink to cope with work-related stress, the more burned out they feel from their work.

Figure 3. Burnout and How Often One has a Drink at the End of the Day to Cope with Stress (N=784)



Advice from Veterinarians and Technicians

In the e-interviews, participants were asked what advice, if any, they would offer to other veterinarians or technicians. Some of their suggestions refer to coping with work stress and also appear effective.

"Teams that do not work well together jeopardize the health and wellbeing of the animal and lead to burnout among the staff."

"Have hobbies outside of work. Make time for your family and friends."

"I would recommend making sure you have good balance between amount of work and play."

"Take time for yourself and be healthy."

Based on the findings reported in this newsletter, several effective coping strategies have been identified that may help in reducing feelings of burnout for veterinarians and technicians and several that may be harmful were identified as well. These are summarized below.

How to Effectively Cope with Work-Related Stress

- **Calm yourself** during your work day – take a time out, walk, or coffee break
- Do **relaxing things** – quiet time at work, other activities after work
- Avoid keeping it to yourself – **talk to others**
- Talk to colleagues and **ask for help** – they may be able to help you
- **Don't ignore it** – the stress isn't likely to just go away
- Spend time with family – share activities with **family and friends** outside of work
- Try to **avoid alcohol** as a coping strategy
- **Exercise** several times a week – it helps!