

## Wellness for Veterinary Professionals

# Renew

This profession can be tremendously rewarding but it can also be incredibly taxing, both mentally and physically. This series—*Renew*—explores wellness for veterinary professionals from a variety of angles...physical, mental, and emotional. We hope these articles provide both insight and inspiration for a lifetime of wellness and renewal.

## Wellness in the Age of Social Media

**By** Caitlin DeWilde, DVM

**T**here's no denying that the threat of negative reviews, comments, and cyberbullying looms in the minds of many veterinary professionals. But we also know that our online reputation and social media presence can be a positive driver for our practices, facilitating connection, education, and service utilization that we may not have had otherwise, especially over the last year. In addition to the toll negative online interactions can take on the practice, those effects can sometimes trickle over into our personal lives. So how do we balance the good and the bad, personally and professionally? Here are some tips to help you stay sane (and safe):

### **Professional Use** **Set up safeguards**

While it seems like avoiding platforms like Facebook, Google, Yelp, and the like will help you avoid potential conflict, the reality is that it isn't true. Not claiming your profiles or populating them with your information just means that those sites will make a platform for you—but now that there's nothing on it that you control, you have no way of being notified and no way to respond to any negativity. Claim the social media platforms and online review platforms, set up notifications, and take control over their appearance and messaging. Facebook and Instagram, in particular, have options for business accounts that will help install additional safeguards—like page moderation (blocking certain words from appearing in visitor posts or comments), the ability to limit showing your page only to those in a certain geographical area or age bracket, and the ability to disable reviews and/or comments in the event of a cyberbullying

attack. Take a few minutes to make sure that all your platforms are set up and these features are enabled.

### **Make sure your clinic has a policy—and stick to it**

Craft a social media policy for your practice that addresses the who, what, when, where, why, and how of social media and online reputation usage. In particular, address who on the team has access to the page, when they should be interacting with it (most comments and reviews do not need an immediate after-hours response!), and when comments or reviews of concern are elevated up the leadership ladder, and how they're dealt with. Practice owners and leaders should have frank discussions about what types of reviews and which reviewers should be addressed. Not every review and comment deserves a response, particularly if it can be reported to the platform, is not from a client, or won't hold weight in the eyes of the types of clients your practice is actively cultivating. While many reviews fall in the "gray zone," having a framework that deals with them is essential to preventing excessive stress in the heat of the moment.

### **Build your ambassador army, and celebrate the wins!**

Many practices spend a disproportionate amount of time thinking about and responding to negative reviews compared to the time spent trying to generate positive reviews. Make leaving a review easy for clients with call-to-action buttons and links in emails, social media posts, and on the practice website, while showcasing your latest 5-star review regularly on your social media pages. Better yet, be sure to share reviews and positive comments with your entire staff!

## Personal Use

### Check your privacy settings

Even when we aren't in charge of managing the practice's social media accounts, our personal profiles can sometimes be discovered by our clients and the occasional keyboard warrior. Review your privacy settings and consider limiting who can see your content.

### Set up a policy for yourself

It's easy to want to kick back and scroll through Instagram for a few minutes after a long shift, but be cognizant of 1) the amount of time you're spending on social media, and 2) the content you're following. We know that smartphone use, particularly when excessive, has been tied to stress, anxiety, and depression. Helpfully, we can now track how much time we're spending on Facebook and Instagram each week, and it might shock you to check your usage. Set time limits for yourself or use an app like Forest to help stay on track. Think back to your original reason for wanting to be on social media—are you accomplishing that? If it's looking at funny cat memes and that's what's in your feed, you're doing great! If you joined so you could connect with your family but you rarely see their content, it's time to review your connections. Make sure to set your Facebook News Feed preferences to ensure you're seeing more of the content that matters. Unfollow old acquaintances who only contact you for pet advice and leave groups that don't add some value to your life.

### Set up safeguards for yourself

While personal profiles don't afford the same handy protections as business profiles, you can still set up a few measures to protect your personal reputation as well. Consider limiting your online interactions (particularly answering veterinary-related questions) with non-

friends and family (we're looking at you, neighborhood Facebook groups).

### Protect yourself when bullying occurs

Ignore messages from those not in your friends or family list. Screenshot and report any negative online interactions, block the offenders, and know where to look if things take an unwanted turn. Put your phone or computer away and put yourself first. Resources from the AVMA and Not One More Vet (NOMV) are excellent starting points for veterinary professionals, although additional helpful resources also exist outside the industry, such as StopBullying.gov. Lean on your colleagues, friends, and family for support, and don't be afraid to contact the authorities if the situation escalates.

While social media and online reputation sites are a function of our daily lives, they can't fully represent who we are as individual practices or individual people. Set up safeguards where you can, use your time effectively, and reach out for help if you need it! ■



This wellness series is proudly brought to you by a sponsorship from Boehringer Ingelheim Animal Health.



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Dr. DeWilde is the founder of The Social DVM, a consulting firm devoted to helping veterinary professionals learn how to manage and grow their social media, online reputation, and marketing strategies. Dr. DeWilde is a graduate of the University of Illinois College of Veterinary Medicine and a recipient of its Outstanding Young Alumni Award, as well as an alum of the AVMA's Future Leaders Program. She served as medical director for a large AAHA/Fear Free/Cat-Friendly certified hospital in St. Louis before stepping back to focus on her marketing passion. Today, she divides her time between practice, consulting, and writing. She is the author of a new book from AAHA Press, "Social Media and Marketing for Veterinary Professionals," and a columnist for Today's Veterinary Business.