

## **Pets are Good for People... of All Ages**

I can gladly say that as a veterinary surgeon, every day I get the wonderful opportunity to make a positive contribution to not only the health and wellness of pets (or animal companions, depending on your linguistic preference) but also to the happiness - and perhaps even the health and wellness - of pet owners. Talk about a job perk!

Americans are increasingly incorporating pets into their families, ranking companionship, love, and affection as the leading benefits of having a pet. Fully 62% of cat and dog owners state that their pets help them relax and relieve stress. And 59% of dog owners and 37% of cat owners feel that their pets help them live longer, better lives. From the results of recent studies, it appears the respondents to these surveys may be right.

Specifically, it has been found that companion animals are associated with lowered blood pressure, fewer visits to the doctor and even better survival rates after a heart attack. A pet companion may also help speed the recovery time for stroke victims. In addition, the American Pet Products Manufacturers Association (APPMA) recently found that the number of cats in the U.S. rose from 77.7 to 90.5 million in three short years and that the number of dogs rose from 65 to 74 million during the same period. So that means a lot more pets providing a lot more companionship and love. And if pets actually do improve the health and well being of our work force, what does this translate to in terms of decreased sick pay, lower health insurance rates, and less missed workdays for employees? It can only be good.

Additionally, a special treat for all of us who work at The Veterinary Specialty Center of Tucson ([www.vscot.com](http://www.vscot.com)) has been to witness the joy, wonderment – and just plain fun – that seniors derive from having a pet by their side to savor the good times and weather the bad. It was 25 years ago that much of these learnings were covered in the classic book “Pets and the Elderly: The Therapeutic Bond” by Odean Cusack and Elaine Smith. And since that time, a great deal more research has demonstrated that for many seniors, having a pet means they feel less lonely and socially isolated.

This is particularly true for older people living on their own. To them, a pet is a great companion, giving them unconditional love and friendship that they would otherwise miss through reduced social contact. It has also been proven that elderly pet owners are more physically active than non-pet owners, with a higher ability to carry out the normal activities of daily living. And we all know that physical activity is great for one’s health – mental and physical. Should you be interested in learning more about the benefits of pets to the elderly there are some great resources out there. As an example, you might want to visit the web site for The Pets for the Elderly Foundation at [www.petsfortheelderly.org](http://www.petsfortheelderly.org). As you will see, they have all kinds of fascinating information on this topic.

Looking ahead, I can only envision the veterinary care field continuing to grow, and I can honestly say that I am proud to be a part of it. Because in the final analysis, the people-pet relationship thrives for one reason: love. We love our pets and they love us. And if our health actually benefits in the bargain, so much the better – especially for seniors!

*Barbara R. Gores, DVM, DACVS established the state-of-the-art, nearly 10,000-square-foot Veterinary Specialty Center of Tucson ([www.vscot.com](http://www.vscot.com)) with James Boulay, DVM, MS, DACVS, in 2004. Located at 4909 N. La Cañada Drive, VSCT employees around 100 Tucsonans.*