

Illustration by  
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For information on how natural therapies can help your pet, or for details of consultations at Richard's referral centre visit [www.naturalmedicinecentre.co.uk](http://www.naturalmedicinecentre.co.uk)

# Co-parenting your pet

Close collaboration with your vet will ensure that your dog is given the best care possible

Last month I wrote about the changes in the veterinary profession since I joined it as a fully paid-up member all of 40 years ago. One change I didn't mention was the difference in the relationship between vet and client.

When I qualified, the vet's word was gospel - whatever your vet said was the right thing to do - operate, euthanize, treat with drugs - you went ahead

with. You wouldn't dream of questioning anything your vet suggested.

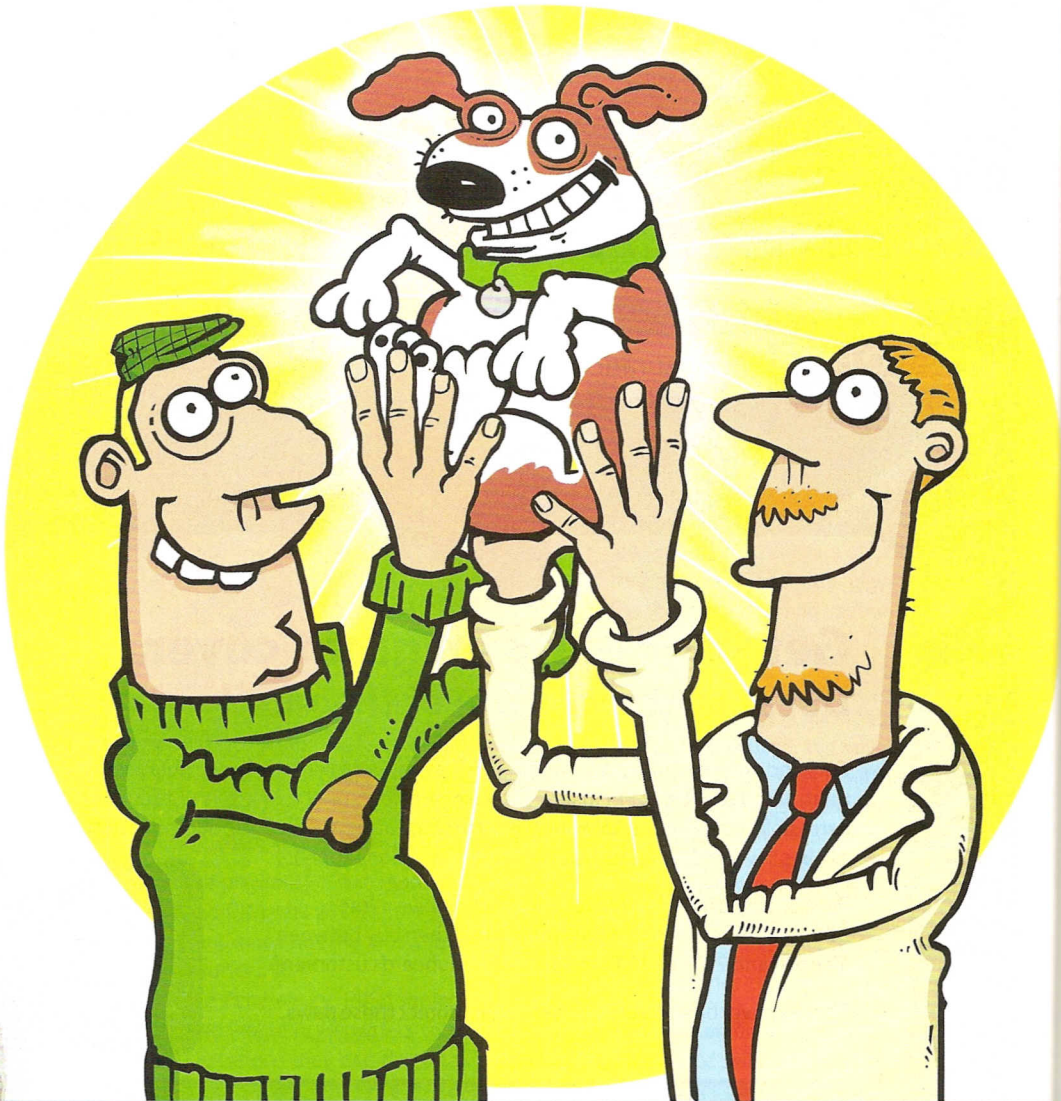
Nowadays clients are more likely to ask questions about investigations and diagnosis, ask for options in regard to treatments offered, ask for a second opinion or referral to a specialist, and ask about what they've "found out about this condition on the internet".

I think this is the single most positive change that

has happened in the last four decades. I've always felt that the health care of a dog should be a 'joint effort' between vet and client. No one knows the dog better than the person who looks after that dog every day of the year. And no vet is blessed with total knowledge about every aspect of canine health.

One recent move to make health care a more communal effort is the Pet

Richard Allport runs a large referral centre in Hertfordshire, offering a range of natural therapies for pets, including homoeopathy, herbal medicine, acupuncture and healing



Parents' Action Group, set up by Catherine O'Driscoll (a regular contributor to *Dogs Today*) and friends. Open to pet carers and vets, the group's aims are to:

- Bring together an international community of people to act as a watchdog for the poorly legislated multi-billion pet products industry.
- Comprise pet owners and veterinarians from around the world who join together in strength to take practical, positive action to protect the wellbeing of pets.
- Expand awareness and understanding of the multi-billion pound international pet products industry, and the harm that is being done to pets.
- Raise awareness within the pet-owning community to effect positive change on behalf of our pets.

A very laudable set of aims, in my view; if you are interested, full information can be found at [www.petparentsactiongroup.org](http://www.petparentsactiongroup.org)

One of the objectives of the group is to put pressure on vets to avoid the over-vaccination of dogs, something that I have mentioned a number of times in this column. I was surprised to find that a survey of vets in 2009 found that a high proportion of vets would consider titre testing dogs as a possible alternative to routine blanket booster vaccination. However, many vets were put off by the high cost of these blood tests (or, I assume, thought their clients would be put off!). Indeed, I have had quite a number of clients say to me that their vets have said, "It's so much cheaper and easier just to give the booster."

Well, if any vet says that

now, they are mistaken. There is an in-house testing kit available to vets, called VacciCheck. This is, I am assured by the manufacturer, no more expensive to buy than the vaccines themselves, so there is no reason why titre testing can't be done by your vet at roughly the same price as the vaccination would have cost.

In my opinion, there is no need to do testing every year - the official veterinary recommendation is to give booster vaccinations at not less than three-yearly intervals, since vaccine protection is known to last for at the very least three years (in fact, for almost all dogs, protection is lifelong following puppy vaccinations and a single booster). Therefore, the most inoculations any dog should receive comprise the initial course of puppy vaccines, one booster at about 15 months of age, and then no further shots unless blood tests show that a booster to any one of the main vaccines is necessary.

Please note that this applies to the main 'core' vaccines - distemper, hepatitis and parvovirus. Other, less important, 'non core' vaccines, such as leptospirosis, may need more frequent boosters if they are given at all.

But whether the leptospirosis vaccine is worth giving (since it gives poor protection and is more likely than most vaccines to cause side effects) is another matter altogether. I'd suggest you join Pet Parents' Action Group and learn more about such things. And remember to tell your vet about VacciCheck too. After all, you have joint responsibility for your dog's health with your vet, and don't you forget it! ■

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