

Healthy pets make for healthy people

By Mark Ross

Pets play an important role in providing emotional support to their owners, reducing feelings of stress and loneliness, and increasing social contact. With over 223 million dogs and 220 million cats worldwide, excluding stray animals, pets have truly become “a member of the family”, sharing our lives and often our homes.

Studies have shown that pets bring us many benefits: providing companionship, encouraging activity, creating a sense of responsibility of care for another being, alleviating loneliness and even lowering blood pressure. Older pet owners are reported to require fewer visits to the doctor. Pets are known to improve the quality of life of people in nursing homes, hospitals, and care centres for the disabled, by encouraging interaction and activity.

In the role of responsible ‘pet parents’ we need to ensure that we do all we can for the health and wellbeing of the animals in our care.

Like people, obesity in household pets is on the increase in virtually epidemic proportions. You only need to observe the average dog or cat in your neighbourhood to realise that New Zealand pets are getting fatter. As with people the causes are usually excessive energy-rich food in the form of snacks and treats, together with insufficient exercise.

Not only does responsible parenting include making sure that pets have healthy diets and plenty of exercise, but also ensuring that they get treatment when they get sick. Pets need medicines, just like we do. Preventing and curing disease in companion animals also means protecting people’s health because there are many pet diseases that can be transferred to humans.

Vaccinations, for example, help to prevent serious infections in dogs and cats. Other conditions can be improved or cured through the use of veterinary medicines: heart diseases, cancer, kidney insufficiency, pain or infections.

Veterinarians are essential partners in keeping pets healthy. They advise owners on a wide range of topics such as infectious diseases and conditions, or routine healthcare such as vaccination, worming, flea treatments, dental health and skincare.

Responsible pet owners ensure their pets get quality healthcare, which allows them to lead comfortable and healthy lives. Agcarm animal health members enable them to do this by making safe, innovative and quality veterinarian medicines available.

With this in mind look after your pets, keep them healthy, take them to a vet for regular health checks, watch their diets and let them take you for a walk!

- Mark Ross is chief executive of Agcarm, the industry association for companies which manufacture and distribute crop protection and animal health products.