

Hey, we love animals!



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So, did you notice the cute puppy embraced by a veterinary technician on this month's cover?

I sure did. It brings back warm and fuzzy memories of pets I've had in the past — mostly dogs and snakes, although I had a lizard for a week and a cat for a while. Unfortunately, it turns out that I'm deathly allergic to the feline critters.

Cynics might assume that the puppy dog pic is designed to increase magazine sales, tear at your heartstrings and make all the pretty girls go "Awwwwww, he (she?) is so cute!"

They would, of course, be right.

After all, pets have been part the human landscape for millennia. In the United States alone, 62 percent of households (71.4 million homes) own a pet, according to a 2009/2010 survey by the American Pet Products Association. Numerous studies have shown that pets benefit their owners by lowering humans' blood pressure, reducing stress, preventing heart disease and fighting depression.

U.S. pet owners spent \$45.5 billion in 2009, shelling out \$12 billion in veterinary care alone. And, as Meghan Rogers, Shruti Gangakhedkar and David Kaber point out in "Keeping Fido's helpers healthy," starting on Page 26, pet caregivers need care also. In New Zealand, for instance, small animal veterinarians had a 64 percent prevalence rate of musculoskeletal disorders.

The three specialists in ergonomics describe a field study at a small animal veterinary practice near Raleigh, N.C. As you can imagine, hauling around animals, including large dogs, leaning into cages to unhook tubes, and restraining uncooperative pets on floors and exam tables can take an ergonomic toll.

The ergonomics team collected data, analyzed job tasks, and identified problem areas and high-risk tasks. The results were a set of recommendations for the veterinarians to incorporate while designing their new, larger facility.

The authors will present their work at the Applied Ergonomics Conference and Expo, being held from March 21-24 at the Hilton Orlando in Orlando, Fla. Those four days will show practitioners ways that ergonomics benefits workers and the bottom line, even if they're not involved in pet care. Who knew?!

Meanwhile, hug your dog, feed your fish and take your snake out for a slither. Hold your cat, too — unless you're allergic, of course.

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