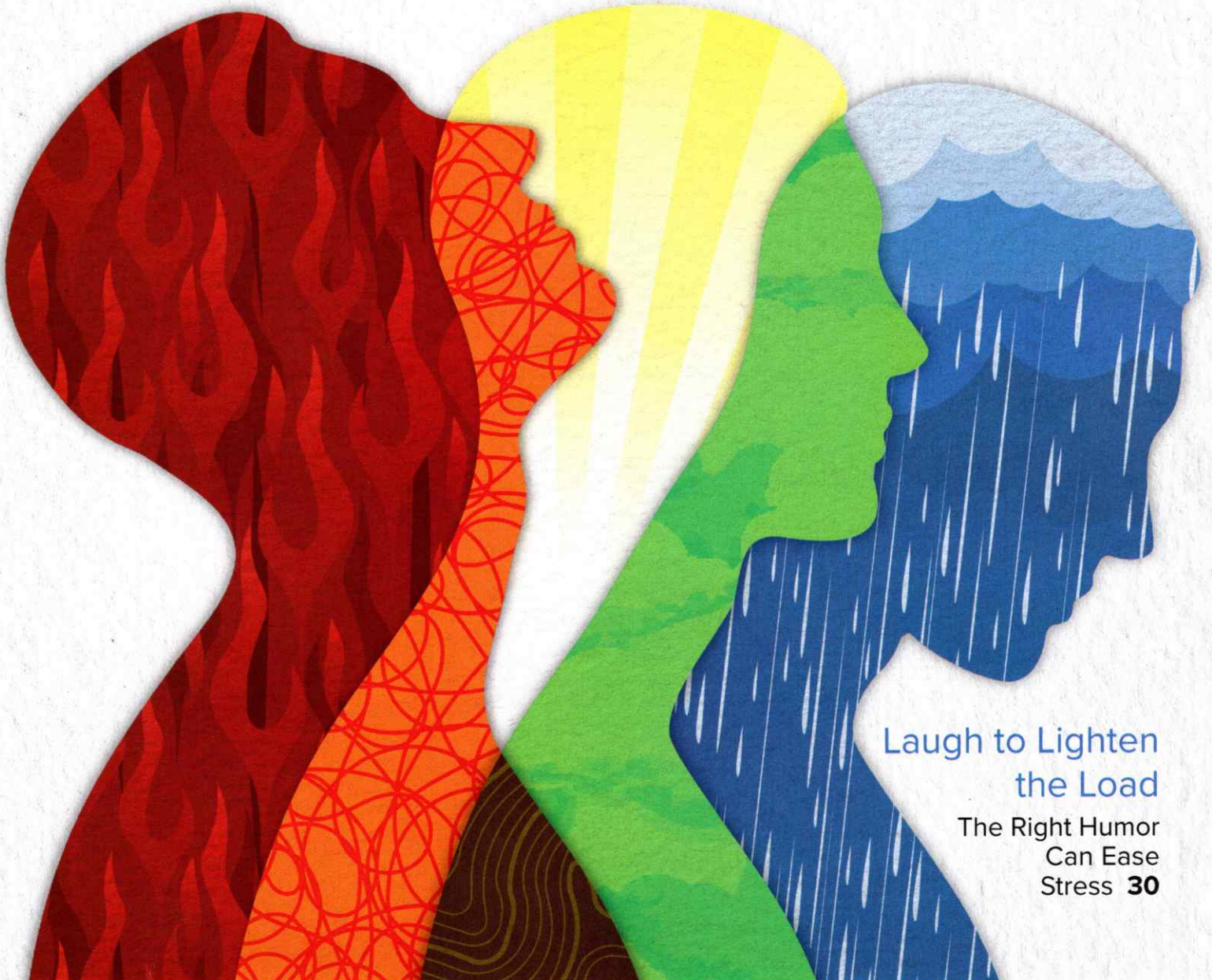


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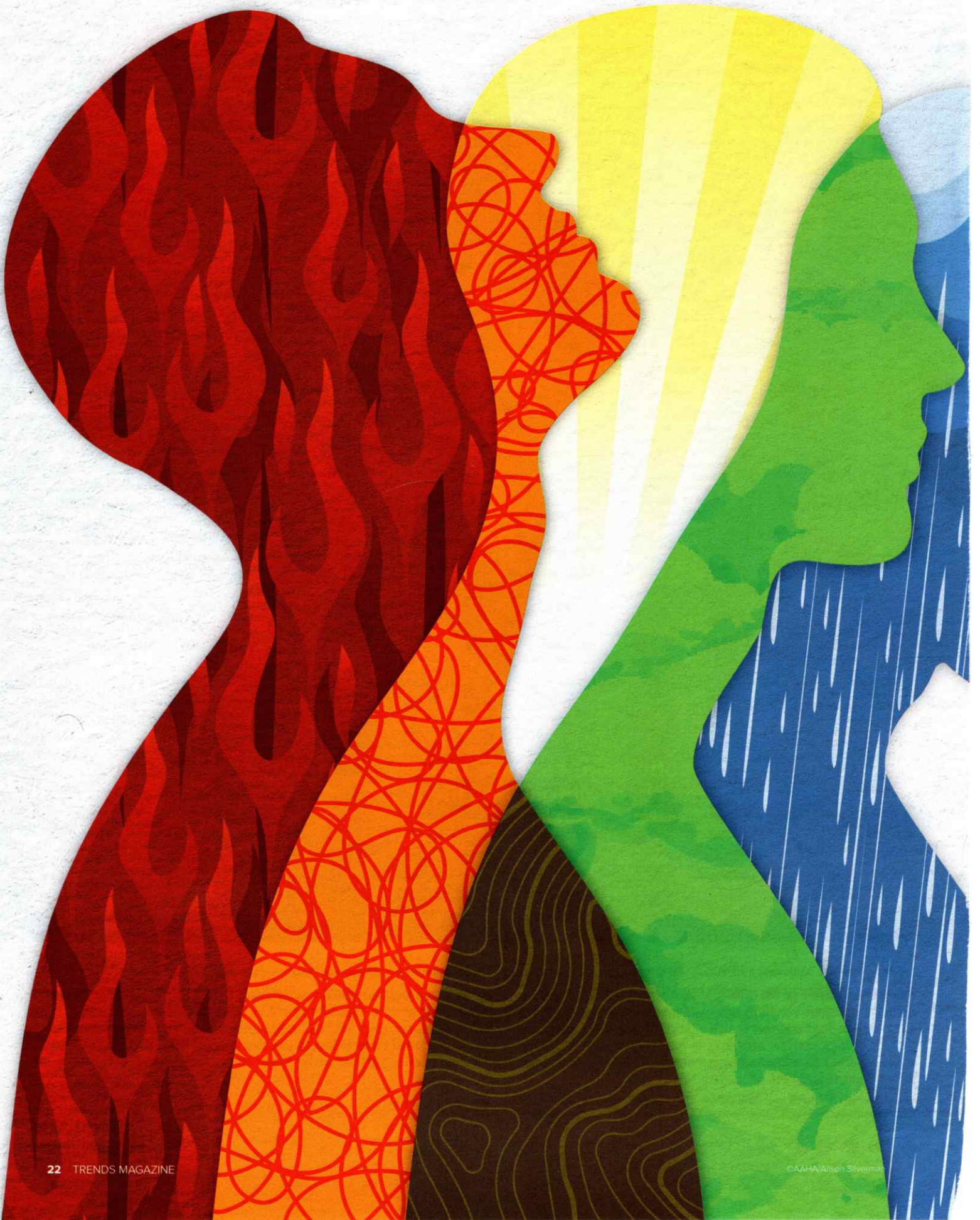
The Spectrum of Wellbeing

Wellness Experts Offer Advice on Team and Self Care **22**



Laugh to Lighten
the Load

The Right Humor
Can Ease
Stress **30**





Beyond the EAP

Protecting the Mental Wellbeing of
Yourself and Your Team in the Day-to-Day

by Jen Reeder

AFTER OVER A DECADE WORKING AS A REGISTERED VETERINARY TECHNICIAN, Kathleen Dunbar, RVT, VTS, MSW, realized she needed to make a change—not by leaving the industry, but by learning how to support it.

“What I kept noticing was the gap in meeting the human needs of the profession,” she said.

So she earned a master’s degree in social work, and now works as a veterinary social worker at AAHA-accredited Carnegie Animal Hospital in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

Dunbar supports the staff in a variety of ways, like lightening their “emotional load” and associated stress by leading pet loss support groups for clients and offering one-on-one counseling to those really struggling with grief or end-of-life decisions. She also offers training to staff, leads psychoeducational workshops, and offers virtual support to veterinary professionals in all four Atlantic provinces in Canada.

Demand for her services has only grown as the pandemic exacerbated longtime challenges like burnout, stress, exhaustion, perfectionism, and compassion fatigue.

“The need is definitely there, and the services need to be offered,” she said. “I don’t know if I’ll see it in my lifetime, but I really believe that a social worker needs to be onsite at every animal hospital.”

That ideal scenario isn’t likely to be realized anytime soon. Meanwhile, burnout alone is



costing the industry up to two billion dollars each year in turnover and reduced hours from veterinarians and veterinary technicians, according to a study published last year titled “The Economic Cost of Burnout in Veterinary Medicine.”

So what can veterinary professionals do in the day-to-day to protect and bolster the mental well-being of both their teams and themselves?

Veterinary social workers and other wellness experts have plenty of ideas.

Back to Basics

Meeting our body’s most basic needs is a good place to start, according to Angie Arora, MSW, RSW, a veterinary social worker who teaches a course on “Acute Self Care” for veterinary professionals.



Angie Arora, MSW, RSW

“When your body needs to go to the bathroom, are you going? When you’re feeling thirsty, are you drinking water? When you need to close your eyes for 10 seconds, are you doing it?”

For most people in the profession—and we understand why—they’re not,” she said. “What starts to happen inside of their bodies is they’re actually starting to train their brains not to trust those internal cues.”

To retrain her brain to understand what her body needs is important, one recent client started keeping water bottles in multiples parts of the hospital, and snacks next to her desk. That way, even if she can’t take time for lunch, she can quickly nosh on trail mix to give her sustenance when she has a minute at her computer.

From there, people can learn to recognize when their body is in fight, flight, or freeze mode and act accordingly, Arora said. For instance, after an argument with a coworker, some of her clients feel their heart beating and retreat to a washroom to do squats or air box for 30 seconds to relieve the stress. Other incidents might call for a deep breath. The key is recognizing what’s happening in the body, and what you might need in the moment.

Checking In

Individuals can also recognize when a colleague might need a break and check in with them, like when a client says something racist to a BIPOC member of the team. Arora noted there is a direct link between chronic stress and racial trauma, so any attempt to address equity issues in a practice will have a positive impact on employee mental health.

“Do concrete things if you have folks on your team whose communities are living through collective trauma,” she advised.

For example, last year when massive floods deluged Pakistan, a practice she works with had several team members whose families lost everything. So leadership offered them breaks and covered shifts to give them time to touch base with their loved ones in Pakistan.

“Organizational care, team care, and self-care are equally important. If we have a commitment and a buy-in at all of those levels, change is very much possible.”

—ANGIE ARORA, MSW, RSW

Good Practice: Stream of Consciousness Writing

Short bursts of journaling—just a few times a week for 15 minutes in the morning—can help us stay calmer during the day and help recognize our thoughts and feelings, according to Kathleen Dunbar, RVT, VTS, MSW. Using pen and paper, write whatever you're thinking of without worrying about spelling or grammar. Then rip up the paper for a cathartic release.

"If we really want to address the mental health and well-being of folks in this profession, we have to have an equal commitment of the practices starting to do things different, and individuals reaching out for the support they need to build their own capacity to respond to the stress," Arora said. "Organizational care, team care, and self-care are equally important. If we have a commitment and a buy-in at all of those levels, change is very much possible."



Phil Richmond, DVM, CAPP, CPHSA, CPPC, CCFP

It's an opinion shared by Phil Richmond, DVM, CAPP, CPHSA, CPPC, CCFP, founder of Flourishing Phoenix Veterinary Consultants and former chief medical and wellbeing officer at Veterinary United.

"I like to look at it from a 'me, we, and us' perspective," he said.

"The way our minds work is that good stuff slides off of us like Teflon and the bad stuff sticks like Velcro. So we have to be really intentional about honoring the good things that happened and reflecting on those."

—PHIL RICHMOND, DVM, CAPP, CPHSA, CPPC, CCFP

He likened the importance of wearing a lead vest while taking x-rays to protect from physical harm to taking steps to prevent psychological harm.

One way to do that is gathering as a team at the end of the day for the "What Went Well?" positive psychology exercise, according to Richmond.





How to Hire a Veterinary Social Worker

Augusta O'Reilly, LCSW, president of the International Association of Veterinary Social Work (IAVSW), said the field is rapidly growing.

"It's an upside to the pandemic: people realized just how important mental health is, and how they need that advocate," she said.

To hire a veterinary social worker through Indeed or LinkedIn, O'Reilly recommends using the term "veterinary social worker" rather than "therapist" or "social worker."

Additionally, IAVSW maintains a Listserv with the University of Tennessee, Knoxville's veterinary social work program to connect hiring managers with VSWs. The organization will post job listings on the Listserv and newsletter.

"The veterinary profession is one that will give and give and give," O'Reilly said. "We need to protect them. And one of the many ways to do that is by working with a veterinary social worker."

For more information, visit: veterinariansocialwork.org/jobpostings.

"You do a huddle at the end of the day and say, 'Everybody go around and share one thing that went really well and how you played a part in that happening,'" he explained. "The way our minds work is that good stuff slides off of us like Teflon and the bad stuff sticks like Velcro. So we have to be really intentional about honoring the good things that happened and reflecting on those."

Richmond is passionate about raising awareness of the value of daily self-care before reaching a crisis point based on his own experiences.

In 2008, personal issues compounded by stressors as a veterinarian led him to a point where he didn't feel like he could go on. Alcohol seemed like the only tool he had. Fortunately, his team recognized what was going on and knew about available programs.

"The physician's health program helped save my life and got me into treatment," he said. "I'm alive because I was a veterinarian. I learned tools of resiliency and changing my thinking and ways of self-care. Not only did those tools help save my life, but they helped me love veterinary medicine again."

Now he's devoted to normalizing conversations about substance use disorders to decrease the stigma—he noted an estimated 12–15% of veterinary professionals will meet criteria for alcohol or substance use disorder at some point in their careers—as well as mentoring early-career veterinarians, who can face a higher risk of serious psychological distress. He serves on the advisory board for MentorVet.

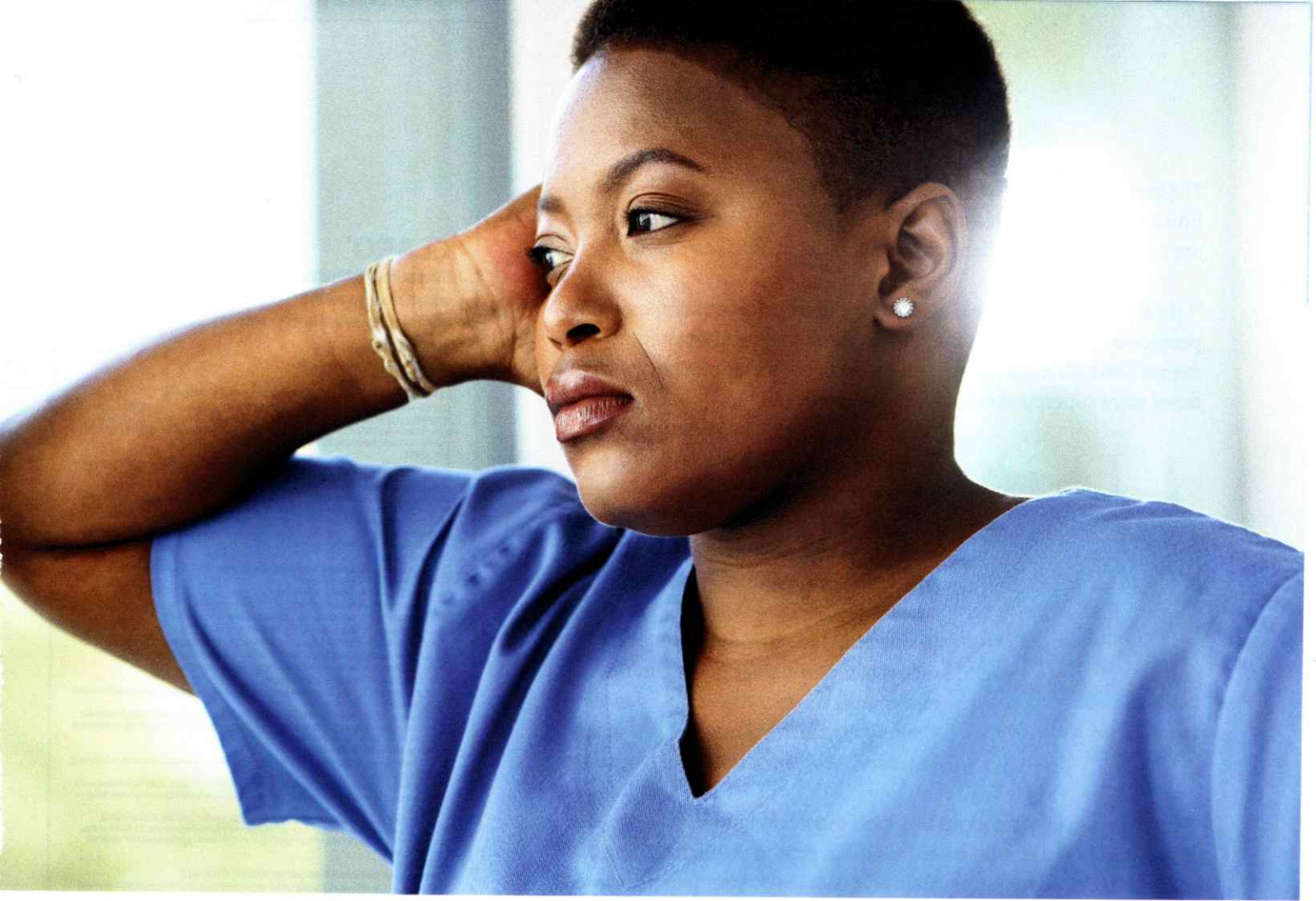
"We hear about the suicide issue and we hear about the mental health challenges, but this is also a beautiful profession," Richmond said. "I want the next generation of people to be able to have healthy and happy pets, and I want the next generation of veterinary professionals to be able to have access to the tools that helped save my life."

Unique challenges can arise at different stages of a career in veterinary medicine, according to Sally Jo VanOstrand, LMSW, who started offering a pet loss support group and other veterinary social worker services in 2018 at AAHA-accredited Stack Veterinary Hospital in Syracuse, New York, which was a 2022 finalist for AAHA Practice of the Year.

For instance, some veterinarians nearing retirement might feel anxious and want to keep a foot in the door in medicine, so they might decide to work or volunteer at an animal shelter or spay/neuter clinic between travel and other leisure activities.

"I think the veterinary field is full of the most brilliant, compassionate people on the planet."

—SALLY JO VANOSTRAND, LMSW



Signs you need to take a break soon include jaw clenching, extreme fatigue, shortness of breath, feeling like a weight is pressing down, tingly feelings in your hands, or a clenched fist.

Impending parenthood can also cause anxiety, particularly for veterinarians with workaholic tendencies trying to balance everything.

“When it comes to motherhood or fatherhood, the biggest thing that you can do to help sustain yourself is to understand that you’re going to need support,” VanOstrand advised. “Keep your support line open and talk to them when you need help. Even if it’s ‘I’m going to need somebody to pick someone up for basketball practice.’”

No matter one’s age, VanOstrand recommends developing a high level of compassion while also keeping boundaries—which can be challenging when teams are short-staffed and patient loads have increased so much during the pandemic.

For instance, if a pet owner calls with an emergency but the day is entirely full, instead of simply saying “sorry” and hanging up, she suggests offering a list of other animal hospitals that might be able to help.

She also hopes veterinary professionals will practice patience with themselves while learning to recognize signs in their body that they need to take a break soon, such as jaw clenching, extreme fatigue, shortness of breath, feeling like a weight is pressing down, tingly feelings in your hands, or a clenched fist.

“This is usually a sign that you’re becoming overwhelmed, and your body is telling you that you need to take a break. Step away from this and regroup,” VanOstrand advised.

The break could involve stepping outside for a breath of fresh air or into a wellness center if available. Stack Veterinary Hospital's wellness area includes a zen garden, aromatherapy, and a massage chair.

"I think the veterinary field is full of the most brilliant, compassionate people on the planet," she said. "I also think that itself bears its own mental load. So learning ways and techniques to better navigate having those extra superpowers is always a good idea."



Melyssa Allen, MA, CHBC, DACLM

Melyssa Allen, MA, CHBC, DACLM, veterinary well-being coach and owner of Mind-Body-Thrive Lifestyle in Orlando, Florida, teaches an online, self-guided course called Vet Calm to improve stress resiliency. She feels caregivers in veterinary medicine excel at giving others compassion—pets, pet parents, and coworkers—but that it can be more challenging for them to silence an inner critic and offer compassion to themselves.

"Finding ways to comfort and support ourselves like we would a good friend is going to be a lot more helpful in getting through challenges in life, but also in making sustainable changes to your lifestyle as well," she shared.

She counsels clients on the "Six Pillars of Health"—physical activity, nutrition, stress management, healthy sleep, positive social connections, and avoidance of risky substances—to enhance stress resilience and reduce burnout.

Allen would also like to break the stigma around going to a therapist. She advises "shopping around" for a good fit on websites like PsychologyToday.com. Often therapists offer a free 15-minute video or phone consultation, she added.

"I know a lot of times people say you need to take care of yourself so you can take care of everyone else in your life, but truly, you just deserve to take care of yourself," she said. "I have an immense amount of gratitude for the veterinary professionals out there." ✨



Award-winning journalist Jen Reeder is extremely grateful for the veterinary professionals who do so much for pets, and the wellness professionals who support them.

CLARO® (florfenicol, terbinafine, mometasone furoate) Otic Solution for use in dogs only

Do Not Use in Cats.

Antibacterial, antifungal, and anti-inflammatory
For Otic Use in Dogs Only

See full product insert for complete prescribing information, a summary of which follows.

CAUTION: Federal (U.S.A.) law restricts this drug to use by or on the order of a licensed veterinarian.

DESCRIPTION: CLARO® contains 16.6 mg/mL florfenicol, 14.8 mg/mL terbinafine (equivalent to 16.6 mg/mL terbinafine hydrochloride) and 2.2 mg/mL mometasone furoate. Inactive ingredients include purified water, propylene carbonate, propylene glycol, ethyl alcohol, and polyethylene glycol.

INDICATIONS:

CLARO® is indicated for the treatment of otitis externa in dogs associated with susceptible strains of yeast (*Malassezia pachydermatis*) and bacteria (*Staphylococcus pseudintermedius*).

DOSEAGE AND ADMINISTRATION:

CLARO® should be administered by veterinary personnel.

Wear eye protection when administering CLARO®.

(see Human Warnings, PRECAUTIONS, POST APPROVAL EXPERIENCE).

Spitter may occur if the dog shakes its head following administration. Persons near the dog during administration should also take steps to avoid ocular exposure.

Shake before use.

Verify the tympanic membrane is intact prior to administration. (see CONTRAINDICATIONS, PRECAUTIONS, POST APPROVAL EXPERIENCE).

Administer one dose (1 dropperful) per affected ear.

1. Clean and dry the external ear canal before administering the product.
2. Verify the tympanic membrane is intact prior to administration.
3. Remove single dose dropperful from the package.
4. While holding the dropperful in an upright position, remove the cap from the dropperful.
5. Turn the cap over and push the other end of the cap onto the tip of the dropperful.
6. Twist the cap to break the seal and then remove cap from the dropperful.
7. Screw the applicator nozzle onto the dropperful.
8. Insert the tapered tip of the dropperful into the affected external ear canal and squeeze to instill the entire contents (1 mL) into the affected ear.
9. Gently massage the base of the ear to allow distribution of the solution. **Restrain the dog to minimize post application head shaking** to reduce potential for splatter of product and accidental eye exposure in people and dogs (see POST APPROVAL EXPERIENCE).
10. Repeat with other ear as prescribed.
11. The duration of the effect should last 30 days. Cleaning the ear after dosing may affect product effectiveness.

CONTRAINDICATIONS:

Do not use in dogs with known tympanic membrane perforation (see PRECAUTIONS). CLARO® is contraindicated in dogs with known or suspected hypersensitivity to florfenicol, terbinafine hydrochloride, or mometasone furoate.

WARNINGS:

Human Warnings: CLARO® may cause eye injury and irritation (see PRECAUTIONS, POST APPROVAL EXPERIENCE). If contact with eyes occurs, flush copiously with water for at least 15 minutes. If irritation persists, contact a physician. Humans with known hypersensitivity to any of the active ingredients in CLARO® should not handle this product.

PRECAUTIONS:

For use in dogs only. Do not use in cats (see POST APPROVAL EXPERIENCE).

Wear eye protection when administering CLARO® and restrain the dog to minimize post application head shaking. Reducing the potential for splatter of product will help prevent accidental eye exposure in people and dogs and help to prevent ocular injury (see DOSEAGE AND ADMINISTRATION, Human Warnings, POST APPROVAL EXPERIENCE).

Proper patient selection is important when considering the benefits and risks of using CLARO®. The integrity of the tympanic membrane should be confirmed before administering the product. CLARO® has been associated with rupture of the tympanic membrane. Reevaluate the dog if hearing loss or signs of vestibular dysfunction are observed during treatment. Signs of internal ear disease such as head tilt, vestibular signs, ataxia, nystagmus, facial paralysis, and keratoconjunctivitis sicca have been reported (see POST APPROVAL EXPERIENCE) with the use of CLARO®. Do not administer orally.

Use of topical otic corticosteroids has been associated with adrenocortical suppression and iatrogenic hyperadrenocorticism in dogs (see ANIMAL SAFETY).

Use with caution in dogs with impaired hepatic function (see ANIMAL SAFETY).

The safe use of CLARO® in dogs used for breeding purposes, during pregnancy, or in lactating bitches, has not been evaluated.

ADVERSE REACTIONS:

In a field study conducted in the United States (see EFFECTIVENESS), there were no directly attributable adverse reactions in 146 dogs administered CLARO®. **POST APPROVAL EXPERIENCE (2019):** The following adverse events are based on post-approval adverse drug experience reporting for CLARO®. Not all adverse events are reported to FDA/CVM. It is not always possible to reliably estimate the adverse event frequency or establish a causal relationship to product exposure using these data.

In humans, accidental exposure leading to corneal ulcers and other ocular injuries such as eye irritation and redness have been reported. Exposure occurred when the dog shook its head after application of CLARO®. Skin irritation has also been reported. In dogs, the adverse events reported are presented below in decreasing order of reporting frequency: Ear discharge, head shaking, ataxia, internal ear disorder (head tilt and vestibular), deafness, emesis, nystagmus, pinnal irritation and ear pain, keratoconjunctivitis sicca, vocalization, corneal ulcer, cranial nerve disorder (facial paralysis), tympanic membrane rupture.

CLARO® is not approved for use in cats. The adverse events reported following extra-label use in cats are presented below in decreasing order of reporting frequency: Ataxia, anorexia, internal ear disorder (head tilt and vestibular), Horner's syndrome (third eyelid prolapse and miosis), nystagmus, lethargy, anisocoria, head shake, emesis, tympanic rupture, and deafness.

To report suspected adverse drug events and/or obtain a copy of the Safety Data Sheet (SDS) or for technical assistance, contact Elanco at 1-800-421-9874.

For additional information about adverse drug experience reporting for animal drugs, contact FDA at 1-888-FDA-VETS or online at <http://www.fda.gov/reportanimalae>.

Information for Dog Owners:

Owners should be aware that adverse reactions may occur following administration of CLARO® and should be instructed to observe the dog for signs such as ear pain and irritation, vomiting, head shaking, head tilt, incoordination, eye pain and ocular discharge (see POST APPROVAL EXPERIENCE). Owners should be advised to contact their veterinarian if any of the above signs are observed. Owners should also be informed that splatter may occur if the dog shakes its head following administration of CLARO® which may lead to ocular exposure. Eye injuries, including corneal ulcers, have been reported in humans and dogs associated with head shaking and splatter following administration. Owners should be careful to avoid ocular exposure (see PRECAUTIONS, POST APPROVAL EXPERIENCE).

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