

## FINDING A RABBIT-SAVVY VETERINARIAN

- **Start the search before you have an emergency!** Rabbits should see a veterinarian at least once a year to help prevent serious medical conditions.
- Do not make your choice based solely on how close the veterinarian is to your home. All veterinarians are trained to care for dogs & cats, but rabbits may have only been one day of their entire veterinary education. Paying money to a veterinarian who does not know anything (or very little) about rabbits is just throwing your money away and can cost the life of your companion.
- Don't assume that just because a veterinarian works with breeders or local 4-H clubs, that they are experienced with house rabbits or the medical needs of older rabbits. Unfortunately, such veterinarians often tend to approach rabbits as stock animals (where the financial bottom line is the primary consideration) rather than as beloved companions.
- Make a list of candidates:
  - Check MCRS's recommended veterinarian list first to see if there are any recommended rabbit veterinarians listed in your area.
  - Check the yellow pages for veterinarians who advertise as "exotic," which includes rabbits.
  - If there are no exotic vets in your area, randomly select several veterinarians who do NOT advertise as avian or exotic. Phone these veterinarians and ask who they refer their clients to if they have a serious rabbit case. Continue the process until you have a clear "winner" or several veterinarians to choose from.
- The next step is to phone the candidates. Let the front office person know that you are concerned with finding the very best veterinarian to care for your rabbit and that you would like to speak directly to the doctor at his/her convenience. Leave both your work and home phone number and specific times that the veterinarian can get hold of you (and be there) or ask what would be a good time for you to call back (when the veterinarian is between appointments).

### WHAT SCREENING QUESTIONS SHOULD I ASK?

- Ask how many rabbits are seen each week. Are they primarily companion animals or livestock?
- Ask how many rabbits are spayed or neutered each week.
- Ask if they know which antibiotics are dangerous for rabbits. Even one dose of the following can be deadly: Amoxicillin (and most of the penicillin drugs like penicillin), lincomycin, clindamycin.
- Casually ask about preventing hairballs. Q: "What's the best way to prevent hairballs?" A: "Provide your rabbit with hay every day, preferably 24 hours a day. Provide daily exercise and brush frequently"
- Ask if food has to be removed the night before surgery. The answer should be "no".
- You might also want to ask which conferences they've attended lately that had talks about rabbit medicine and what journals they read. You want your veterinarian to know the latest in rabbit treatments.
- About how many rabbit clients does the veterinarian see in a year?
- How many spays/neuters OF RABBITS has the veterinarian has done in the past month?
- What was the success rate? (90% success is way too low. Every doctor, whether for animals or humans will occasionally lose a patient; usually because of an undiagnosed problem. Experienced veterinarians across the country who regularly spay/neuter rabbits have lost on average less than 1/2 of 1%.)
- If any were lost, what was the cause?
- Does the veterinarian require withholding of food and water prior to surgery in rabbits? (It is better not to do this--rabbits can't vomit, so there is no risk of that during surgery, and rabbits should never be allowed to get empty digestive tracts)
- what anesthetics are used (some veterinarians are quite successful with anesthetics other than isofluorene, but the bunny is "hung over" after surgery, which increases the probability that s/he will be slow to start eating again, which can lead to serious problems if not dealt with.)
- Any other specific questions or concerns you have for the veterinarian.

If you don't get the "right" answers to the above questions, continue your search until you find the right veterinarian for you & your rabbit.