

When The Vet Comes, Be Tactful, Quiet, And Prompt In Payment

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MERTZON — Last winter, people in this country became painfully aware that we were hosting a number of new livestock ailments and disorders. Where once the dryness of the land protected us from most of the parasites and blights of the higher rainfall belts, there were now a variety of pestilences and viruses. At the peak of the attack it wouldn't have surprised anyone if the Indian Elephantiasis had broken out everywhere from the chicken house to the bull pasture.

While all this was going on, I began to make notes on the visiting veterinarians, recording data on each doctor. Then my material was assembled to form what could be the first set of tips on how to treat the veterinarian when he is in the field.

In its present form, the report looks like this:

1. Calling a licensed veterinarian "Doc" or just plain "Vet" will get you nowhere. Any category of veterinarian, from the large animal practitioner to the dog trimmer, should be accorded the same respect given to archbishops, viceroys, and potentates in the upper echelons of Boy Scouting or the P.T.A. Being over-familiar with a livestock physician is as foolish as calling irate wives or enraged mothers-in-law by their first name.

2. In all instances, the stall-side and chute-side manner of a practicing veterinarian is a delicate thing. The animal owner should never interrupt the doctor as he approaches his patient. To interfere by making small talk or hissing his procedure can prove as embarrassing as rustling your program just as a matador delivers his final sword thrust. Coughs or any other noises peculiar to the human body must be suppressed, regardless of the chances of damage to the inner workings of your system. Often a simple clearing of the throat is enough to break the spell.

3. Animal doctors, and particularly horse specialists, should not be asked to treat every beast on the ranch. For example, if the family parakeet has an acute case of inner-cage vertigo, or if the tomcat has a fierce ear rash, do not ask a horse doctor to lift a wing or a whisker.

4. The practice of veterinary medicine and its counterpart reserved for humans must not be confused. Regardless of how one feels about the old theory that M. D.s and undertakers have a close business relation, there is no excuse for assuming that veterinarians and renderers are connected.

5. Never mention money in front of a veterinarian. This is as unethical as attempting to discuss a monumental hangover with the owner of a large chain of liquor stores. Be patient. The topic of money will come up in due time. In fact, if the bill for his services goes long unpaid, the veterinarians' attorney will probably supply a lengthy discussion of money.

6. In order to retain good relations with an animal physician, never hold him to an appointed time. If he happens to keep you waiting 11 hours under a sparsely leafed mesquite tree, greet him as if nothing is amiss. As a whole, veterinarians are sensitive people. A good rule is to treat one as you would a badly disturbed cello player.

Before I could go further with this project, drought scalded the epidemic into one indistinguishable catastrophe. From now on, the work will be slow and sporadic.

I do hope, however, someday to completely define the relationship between the rancher, the patient, and the vet.