CONVERSATION STARTER
Osteoarthritis and obesity are inextricably linked. Here are tools and insight for better management of these patients.

Improve Outcomes in Arthritic Pets

In 2017, Banfield Pet Hospital and the North American Veterinary Community (NAVC) partnered to release the first annual Veterinary Emerging Topics (VET)® Report. Our 2017 and 2018 reports focused on antimicrobial usage patterns among veterinarians treating common canine and feline infections, respectively. For the 2019 report, we shifted gears to examine management of osteoarthritis (OA) in overweight pets.
Efforts in the veterinary and pet care industry to address the overweight pet epidemic have thus far proven unsuccessful, with Banfield’s 2017 *State of Pet Health Report* finding 1 in 3 pets in the U.S. is overweight or obese—and witnessing a 169% increase in overweight cats and a 158% increase in overweight dogs over the past 10 years.

As veterinary professionals know all too well, these pets are at higher risk of developing comorbidities like OA. Given the close relationship between excess weight and OA, we believe a focus on this condition and the importance of weight management in the treatment process is important to evaluate. There exists an opportunity to evolve how we have conversations about excess weight in pets—and to improve the outcomes of treating OA by reinforcing the importance of weight loss in these pets.

As part of the report, patient medical records from both canine and feline OA cases were reviewed. In addition, an online survey of veterinarians was conducted to better understand the practices in the diagnosis and management of newly diagnosed OA pets, as well as perceived barriers to providing recommended care. The Banfield study also looked at diagnostic and therapeutic practices in general veterinary practice. While guidelines and therapeutics exist, we found that following and incorporating these into the management of OA in a general veterinary practice is challenging for both the veterinary team and the pet owner.

Managing OA, particularly in pets with excess weight, is not new to the veterinary profession; however, we found several opportunities exist to improve the care these affected pets receive. Quality medical management of OA requires a multi-faceted diagnostic and treatment plan—a combination of diagnostic testing, multi-modal pain management, and weight management all needs to be considered to most effectively improve patient outcomes.

### Opportunity #1
**Dispense pain medications for OA pets!** Almost half of the pets diagnosed with OA did not receive pain medications at the time of diagnosis. Identifying barriers to treatment—for example, cost or the owner not recognizing their pet is in pain—and finding solutions to reduce them can improve a pet’s comfort, increase mobility, and demonstrate the value of therapeutic management to the pet owner.

### Opportunity #2
**Tools for early identification or recognition.** Client education materials, activity monitors, and validated quality of life (QoL) or chronic pain index instruments may facilitate client understanding of normal vs. abnormal for an older dog—and encourage initiation and continuation of the management plan.

### Opportunity #3
**Incorporate a nutritional component.** Nutritional management is an important component of the multi-modal approach to managing OA patients. Recent surveys indicate that pet owners want their veterinarian to provide diet or other nutritional recommendations for their pets.

### Opportunity #4
**Weight management.** Helping pet owners get their pets to a healthier or ideal weight is an integral component in management of these pets. Research has found that, in obese dogs, losing as little as 6.1% of their weight can lead to improvement in the clinical signs of OA. Veterinary technicians gathering a clear diet history at each visit, including treats, is an important part of weight management. Consider utilizing veterinary technician appointments to check on progress.

### Opportunity #5
**Patient management as a team effort.** Every pet you encounter provides an opportunity to notice changes its owner might not notice—or consider normal—in their aging pet.

With the above opportunities in mind, an inward assessment of how a hospital team manages OA pets and how they can modify their approaches has the potential to improve the quality of veterinary care offered to their owners. A tool adapted from a human
At The Core: Quality of Care

Quality care in veterinary medicine can be achieved, in part, by utilizing methods and tools adapted from human healthcare. These tools can be used to assess interventions and changes to achieve desired results.

The Five Domains of Quality can be used to guide decision-making and drive quality in a veterinary practice.

Understanding the Domains of Quality and Applying Them to Care Delivery

SAFE: Having the right culture, systems and equipment in place to create a safe environment for associates, clients and pets, thus avoiding harm.

Application: Perform full physical examination, as well as CBC and blood chemistry blood chemistry as appropriate before starting on long-term pain medications and at regular intervals, to monitor for changes in health status and to adjust treatment plan accordingly.

EFFECTIVE: Providing the care that meets quality standards of our profession.

Application: Stay abreast of guidelines and new medications to properly diagnose and treat these cases of OA.

PET- AND CLIENT-CENTERED: Building relationships to become a trusted partner to our clients, and identifying the unique, individual needs of each pet to provide appropriate care.

Application: Engage clients in their pet’s health by utilizing tools that enable them to recognize their pet is osteoarthritic and/or overweight earlier and develop a management plan tailored for their pet and home environment.

TIMELY: Seeing pets when they need to be seen to help keep them healthy, prevent future disease and treat current disease.

Application: Ensure that all hospital team members are capable of meeting the needs of pets and clients, from scheduling pets when they need to be seen to providing diagnostics and treatment to follow-up conversations to assess adequacy of management plan.

EFFICIENT: Managing use of resources to minimize waste and maximize the value of care provided.

Application: Involve other hospital team members in joining the conversation with owners about their pet’s condition and management. This may allow follow-up questions or consultations (e.g., weigh-ins) to not necessarily be dependent on the availability of the veterinarian but may be handled by other trained team members (e.g., licensed or registered veterinary technicians).

FIGURE 1. The Five Domains of Quality promote safe, effective, patient-centered, timely, and efficient care. CBC = complete blood count.
Veterinary technicians gathering a clear diet history at each visit, including treats, is an important part of weight management. Consider utilizing veterinary technician appointments to check on progress.

healthcare quality model, the Five Domains of Quality, can also be applied by veterinary hospital teams to enhance the quality of care, assess interventions, and improve patient outcomes (FIGURE 1). TVN

References