

**TOOLS FOR SUCCESS**

Certification programs help practitioners incorporate the human-animal bond into daily care.

**MEET THE AUTHOR**

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Beckie graduated from Central Carolina Community College in 2007 with her AAS in veterinary medical technology and graduated from the University of North Carolina at Pembroke with a bachelor's in non-profit and public administration in 2019. Beckie has enjoyed a diverse career in small animal, large animal, and mixed practices; academia; and management and consulting. Beckie co-founded Veterinary Advancement, is a professional medical responder with the ASPCA Field Investigations Response (FIR) Team, is the Volunteer Director of Operations 3K9 Working Dogs, and co-hosts the podcast *Veterinary Viewfinder*.

Elevating the Human-Animal Bond

The human-animal bond (HAB) is a beautiful and dynamic relationship. Evidence of the existence of the HAB dates as far back as 14 000 years ago with the discovery of paleolithic remains of a man and woman buried with a young dog. Further investigation of the remains uncovered evidence the dog had been cared for through illness, indicating not only domestication but affection and care for the dog.¹ This bond has grown and developed over time, from domestication, preservation, and protection of species, to pets filling the role of “child” in many households.



For the members of the veterinary industry and parallel professions, the HAB may be the foundation of everything we do. The American Veterinary Medical Association defines the HAB as “a mutually beneficial and dynamic relationship between people and animals that is influenced by behaviors essential to the health and wellbeing of both. This includes, among other things, emotional, psychological, and physical interactions of people, animals, and the environment.”²

TAKING THE NEXT STEP

The HAB is what we see in the joyful laugh of a new pet owner, the tears of heartbreak when it is time to say goodbye, and every interaction and emotion in between. While we experience the variable presentations of this bond, and likely have experienced it on a personal and emotional level, relatively few professionals have developed their knowledge of the foundation and application of the HAB.

The North American Veterinary Community (NAVC) has partnered with VetFolio, Zoetis, and the Human-Animal Bond Research Institute (HABRI)—as well as many of the top minds in the discovery, promotion, and elevation of the HAB—to create a certificate for veterinary professionals (navc.com/certifications). This Human-Animal Bond Certification course covers the history, application, and marketing of the HAB in our practices and professional lives. Additionally, the content of the course enhances our ability to educate others about the HAB, enjoy its benefits, and elevate this gift among our co-workers and clients.

This 22-hour RACE-approved CE course includes 11 learning modules, quizzes, and a final exam required before certification approval, providing the most in-depth and expansive review of our role as veterinary professionals and caregivers in the promotion of this bond. These modules cover various aspects of the HAB, including the history of the bond, the science behind the bond, and factors affecting the bond. The content expands on ways to communicate with clients when focusing on a bond-centered conversation and bond-centered practices, animal welfare and wellness, community engagement, and ways to market your practice in a bond-centered fashion. The course also calls to focus the critical research performed by HABRI in facilitating our knowledge as veterinary professionals. The modules are broken into easily consumed sections of narrated presentation style lessons that create manageable content breakdown.

PUTTING KNOWLEDGE TO PRACTICE

The events of 2020 have brought into focus, possibly more than ever, the value of the HAB as socialization outside the home has otherwise been restricted. Many found comfort in the companionship, capitalized on the opportunity to spend more time training and playing, and even adopted a new pet. While 2020 has brought many challenges, some veterinary professionals have been able to take advantage of online learning and certifications. Additionally, online learning tools helped facilitate CE opportunities, providing the joy of learning and engagement that many are missing due to the COVID-19 pandemic. With the stress, changes, and challenges brought on across the globe during this time, the Human-Animal Bond Certification is a perfect way to develop, learn, and celebrate the bond that, for many, has kept us smiling and engaging through this and so many other challenging times. For members of the veterinary profession, this course helps us to bring the HAB and practical applications for practice to the forefront of our minds.

Despite our deep-rooted passion and love for the animals we treat, all too often we neglect to address the HAB outside of the clinic and inside the home. We may forget the actual physical and mental effect this furry, fuzzy, scaly, or feathered little being brings to the *person* in front of us. That is why Zoetis, the founder of the HABRI, instituted a campaign called The Pet Effect. This initiative is designed to “introduce pet owners to the health benefits of the human-animal bond, and to understand how important their veterinarians are for happy, healthy pets.”³

Many published papers have shown that pets can be a helpful part of therapy for some people struggling with autism, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and depression.³ Pets also contribute to heart health and overall wellbeing. Yet, I have never had a human healthcare professional encourage me to get a pet or discuss the possible health benefits. My husband—a combat veteran with PTSD, night terrors, and high blood pressure—never had a pet or therapy dog recommended to him. How do we spread the message and bridge the gap to ensure the benefit of The Pet Effect and the HAB is a part of every treatment option across all species? We keep the HAB at the forefront of everything.

The person, the *human*, is the bridge that ensures that the patient in front of us gets the care, training, and

husbandry that we know are essential to the welfare and wellbeing of our patient. The key to our successful patient outcomes is the HAB. When we incorporate this bond into the foundation of our practice mission and when we let it lead our conversations and even our treatment plans, we respect our client's needs. Through this relationship, we are more likely to build the trust and understanding it takes for client compliance and better patient outcomes. We discuss treatment options based on client concerns, lifestyle, and level of comfort with the options available. We make them part of the team. We consider what happens when they leave the clinic and the impact our treatment plan has on their bond. We need to create a plan that is rooted in developing our knowledge and application of the HAB.

And we have more opportunities than ever to do so. Veterinary professionals often blame clients for consulting "Dr. Google." However, if we flip the narrative, we would recognize that individuals invested in obtaining knowledge and understanding are trying to be the best caregivers they can be. They are looking to be an active part of the healthcare team and are ready to contribute to positive patient outcomes.

While not all of our clients provide the same level of care and compliance, we must treat every individual in our clinic as a part of the team and utilize the HAB daily. We will then find the parameters that our client can work within. We uncover the time, energy, and mental space to provide care for their pet. We meet them where they are. When we have this information, we then have the tools to create treatment plans, recommendations, and even promote clinic services that not only contribute to the best patient outcomes but also serve the needs of our clients. We create clients and patients for life.

While the experience of the HAB is different for everyone, one commonality is that the world is a much better place because of this ever-changing and developing bond. **TVN**

References

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