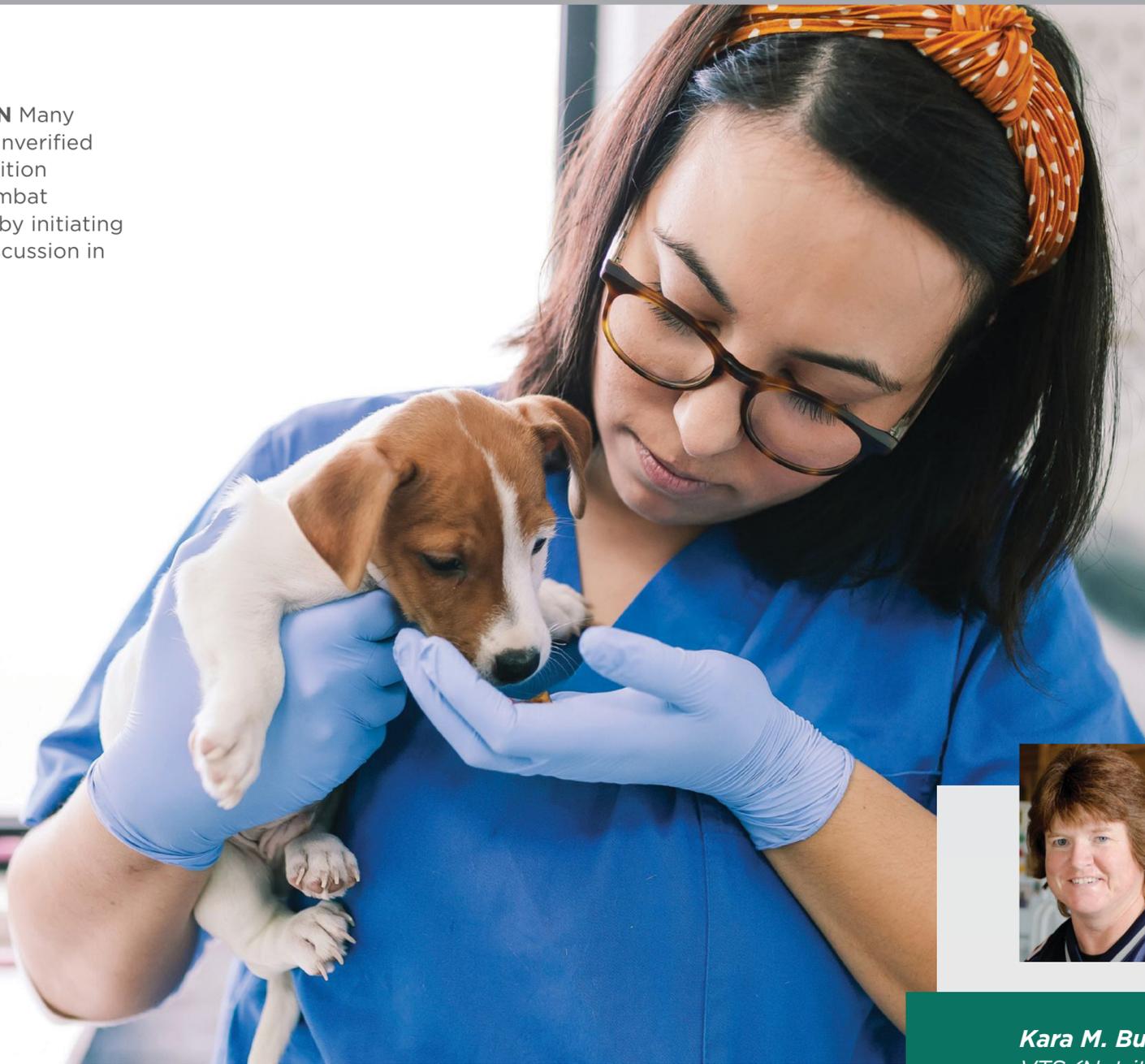




START THE CONVERSATION Many clients look to unverified sources for nutrition information; combat misinformation by initiating the nutrition discussion in every visit.



MEET THE AUTHOR

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Nutrition Coach Certification: Helping Pets Live Long, Vibrant Lives

In veterinary medicine, nutrition is one area that affects each and every pet that presents to the hospital. When we look at the 3 components that affect the life of an animal—genetics, environment, and nutrition—nutrition is the factor that the veterinary healthcare team can impact.¹ Veterinary nurses can play a critical role in nutrition counseling if they are a part of a total team approach and expand their knowledge through continuing education (CE) opportunities.

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NUTRITION IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Proper nutrition is the foundation for healing and maintaining proper health. Research is demonstrating the benefits of feeding the companion animal the right food for its life stage. Pet owners have access to vast educational resources and are subsequently becoming more educated and bringing detailed questions to the healthcare team. This should be welcomed and not frowned upon as these interactions show the owner wants to be educated about the best nutrition for their pet and provide an excellent opportunity for the veterinary team to properly educate the client.

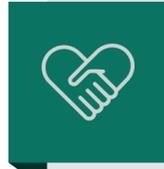
The positive effect of proper nutrition on health and disease is well recognized in all animals. Appropriate nutrition during each stage of life facilitates the prevention of diet-associated diseases and assists in the management of other diseases. Nutritional assessments and recommendations must be completed for every patient that enters the hospital. These assessments are an iterative process, in which each factor affecting the animal's nutritional status is assessed and reassessed as often as required. The factors to be evaluated include the animal, the diet, feeding management, and environmental factors.

Veterinary healthcare team members understand that pet owners feed their pets every day. This affords team members the opportunity to have an in-depth discussion with pet owners and to educate the owner on proper nutrition, which can lead to a better quality of life for their pet. The goal of the veterinary team is to help patients live a long, happy, and healthy life. Incorporating nutritional assessments into regular animal care is crucial for maintaining pets' health, as well as their response to disease and injury. Therefore, it is imperative to initiate nutrition discussions with pet owners every time the pet visits the hospital.

Nutritional assessment guidelines for the veterinary profession, published by both the American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA)² and the World Small Animal Veterinary Association (WSAVA)³ reinforce the fact that good nutrition enhances pets' quality and quantity of life and is integral to optimal animal care. The entire healthcare team should be involved as it requires little to no additional time or cost to the team, but the benefit to the patient is immeasurable.

THE FIFTH VITAL ASSESSMENT

Integrating nutritional assessments into a veterinary



In an AAHA study, 90% of pet owners want nutritional recommendations, yet 15% perceive they are given one.⁴

hospital requires dedication and participation of the entire veterinary team. This integration leads to success, optimal pet health, a strengthened client-pet relationship, and an improved long-term client relationship with the practice. The nutrition guidelines of both AAHA and WSAVA prompted the consideration of nutrition as the fifth vital assessment and helped promote the nutritional standard of care.

Pet owners truly do believe that their veterinary team members are experts in pet health as well as pet nutrition. In an AAHA study, 90% of pet owners want nutritional recommendations, yet 15% perceive they are given one.⁴ The AAHA compliance study revealed 7% of the pets that could potentially benefit from therapeutic foods were actually employing that therapy.⁴ There is tremendous opportunity for veterinary professionals to take a role otherwise filled by non-veterinary personnel.

VETERINARY TEAM APPROACH

There are many benefits to deploying or adopting a team approach to the practice mission, and the veterinary nurse is especially poised to lead the initiative to provide nutritional care for all patients. A group effort increases efficiency by distributing workload and delivering an integrated, cohesive message about the importance of nutrition and the value of preventive care. Our profession needs to remember that no one can do it all. When roles are delegated, everyone contributes to success and individual motivation increases to accomplish results.

WHY NUTRITION?

The majority would answer that our "why" is to help animals. If that is the case, why would we not focus on nutrition, as we know nutrition is the cornerstone to good health? Incorporating nutrition into the practice is good medicine, good business, and the right thing to



do for our patients. What does this mean for veterinary team members and veterinary hospitals? It means incorporating a nutritional assessment into the routine examination protocol for every patient, every time they visit the practice. It means adding nutrition to the other vital assessments: temperature, pulse, respiration, and pain assessment. It means satisfying client expectations for a specific nutritional recommendation. And finally, it means extending the health and special lifelong relationships of pets.

IMPROVING KNOWLEDGE: PET NUTRITION COACH CERTIFICATION

The pet food industry is a multi-billion-dollar business that can be very confusing to our profession and to our clients. Clients often make pet food decisions based on personal preferences and what speaks to them from the product packaging or company advertising. It is nearly impossible to know details about every pet food or to be able to refute every myth or misconception clients have. However, understanding the fundamentals of pet nutrition, being able to cut through the confusion and chaos in the pet food industry, and having crucial conversations about pet food with clients positions veterinary professionals to be the trusted coach clients are looking for to provide the very best nutrition to help their pets live long and healthy lives.

To help veterinary teams become the trusted source of nutrition information for clients, the NAVC offers the Pet Nutrition Coach Certification program available through the VetFolio platform (**BOX 1**). Veterinary professionals can access valuable nutrition education that provides them with a foundational understanding of the importance and application of nutrition in optimal health care for dogs and cats. This program helps teams cut through the noise and confidently recommend the nutrition that fits what their client wants and what their patient needs.

BOX 1

Pet Nutrition Coach Certification

The NAVC Pet Nutrition Coach Certification program is a self-paced online training with a final exam for certification that offers 8 hours of RACE-approved CE. Learn more at navc.com/certifications/pncc.

The goal of the Pet Nutrition Coach Certification program is to provide a practical, action-oriented series of modules written by experienced nutritionists, practitioners, and educators (including the author of this article) to assist the entire veterinary healthcare team in integrating nutrition as a cornerstone of patient care. The program strengthens the nutrition core of the veterinary healthcare team and empowers them to competently and confidently have pet nutrition discussions with clients and the ability to make a specific recommendation for the best care of their patients.

The Pet Nutrition Coach Certification program provides 8 CE hours composed of self-paced educational modules looking at all aspects of nutrition's role in the veterinary hospital. This includes understanding nutrition as the fifth vital assessment, the central role that the entire veterinary healthcare team has in providing optimal pet care, effective communication to support shared goals, and successfully integrating pet food recommendations and sales into hospital protocols. Additional learning modules provide education and learning on the fundamentals of nutrition, nutritional requirements of cats and dogs, important calculations for effective nutritional management, navigating nutritional myths and misconceptions, and meeting client preferences for natural or raw diets.

Veterinary healthcare teams recognize that nutrition is important to their patient's health and want to make the best food recommendation. Clients want the best for their pets and for their pets to live long, healthy lives. Incorporating nutrition into the practice is good medicine, good business, and the right thing to do for our patients and our clients. The Pet Nutrition Coach Certification program provides nutritional education for the entire team to ensure nutrition is incorporated into the practice philosophy, in the best interest of the patient. **TVN**

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