



Notes from the Consultant's Corner

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Give it a Rest

Are you tired? I don't mean physically tired (although it seems like most people are these days). I mean- are you tired emotionally? I'm beginning to see just how many of you in the veterinary profession are. You're tired of fighting disease, you're tired of being compassionate, tired of seeing death, tired of caring for patients that eventually die, tired of dealing with stress on your job, and you're tired of "being tired." Sound familiar? Maybe it's time that you take some rest. What... *rest*? Yes... I said it- the **R** word. Now I don't mean taking a day off to catch up on personal errands, grocery shopping, or paying bills. I mean taking a true *rest*. I mean taking a day to do absolutely nothing except to rest your heart and mind completely.

Sound crazy? I was reading a book* the other day about how many of us have lost our ability to rest. The author talked about how in our everyday crazy lives, we have lost our natural rhythm between work and rest. Just as nature moves from the activity of spring and summer to the dormancy of fall and winter, we too, are meant to take periods of rest. This is the natural order of life. However, this natural rhythm has been lost because our culture no longer places any value on rest. In reading this book, I started thinking about how common this in the veterinary profession.

Rest is no longer a natural and good thing; on the contrary, rest has become a bad thing- something to be avoided and ashamed of. Expressions like "couch potato", "slug", and "sloth" demonstrate just how much disdain we have for the notion of rest. It seems that in many veterinary arenas (just as in our culture at large) we believe that action and success are better than rest. Doing something- *anything*- is better than doing nothing. Resting is often compared to failure and we have come to believe that the busier we are, the better we are. Today, over-extending ourselves and being chronically tired are our "badges of honor" and the true mark of a successful life.

In light of this I'm wondering how we can possibly cope with the stressors and demands of everyday life when we're in a state of chronic emotional fatigue? How can you in the veterinary profession do such an enormously difficult job while completely exhausted?

One thing is for sure...without rest- we lose our way. When we're exhausted, we cannot "process" our emotions anymore in healthy ways. We become hypersensitive and respond with complete desperation. Our emotions are exaggerated and our negative feelings linger like a nasty cold that we can never shake.

Emotional fatigue not only affects our feelings, but our intellect as well. I've spoken to many veterinarians who've said that the more burned-out they are, the less confident they feel to practice medicine. Many report that they worry about missing a diagnosis or treating an illness with the incorrect plan simply because they can no longer "see the forest for the trees." They question their intuition and natural abilities because their intuition has been stripped from them through utter exhaustion.

Maybe it's time that we stop the madness! Don't you want to stop? I know I do. I'm willing to bet that many of you are in desperate need of rest. I think that it's high time to make rest a valued commodity again. We must stop this insanity and we must do it soon. Oh sure...there will be this little voice inside you that scolds you for harboring such thoughts... especially the **R** word, but it's time. It's time to restore your sense of balance and re-connect with the things in life that make you reel regenerated and refreshed.

I can guess what you're probably thinking...is this all-just "pie in the sky"? I honestly don't know. I hope not. I certainly know that for myself, the inner voice will not only scold me, it will yell at me full blast with a large heaping of guilt and self-reproach. But hey, maybe it's time that I had a nice juicy argument with myself. The rewards might be worth the effort and I'm willing to at least explore the idea. I encourage you to give it a try as well. I think that if many of us are going to stop the insanity that we have created, we've got to give it a rest.

*Muller W: *Sabbath: Restoring the Sacred Rhythm of Rest*. Bantam, New York, 1999, pp 1-8.