

We are all bipolar, by a vet

According to Wikipedia, the bipolar disorder (or manic–depressive disorder) is a psychiatric diagnosis that describes a category of mood disorders defined by the presence of one or more episodes of abnormally elevated mood.[1] These episodes are usually separated by periods of "normal" mood, but in some individuals, depression and mania may rapidly alternate, known as rapid cycling.

It can affect to around 5% of the population in its different presentations. It is not always negative as sometimes it gets associated with people with creative talents like Mel Gibson, Stephen Fry, Virginia Woolf...

Once we have learnt a tinny amount about a condition that can affect a colleague, a family member or a client, let's focus on why, as vets, we need to be bipolar. Our job is very important for us and for our patients and their owners. Our job has two very differentiated sides that we need to address in two completely different ways.

For starts, as vets, we need to know what are we selling and how it is not the same to sell a bag of food than a clinical diagnosis. One is a product and the other is a service. When selling a product, you have clients, but when selling a service, you have patients. Both of them are as important as each other.

We, as vets, know how important is to have a healthy intestine, free of any parasites, and how the best way to achieve this is regular worming tablets. Why do we not sell it with the same enthusiasm as a contrast study when a dog or cat suffers from gastro-intestinal symptoms?. If we believe that a low sodium diet will benefit hypertensive patients, why do we not include a prescription diet low in sodium at the same time that we prescribe a few tablets?

I could continue with more examples, but the general idea is that when our boss tells us that we need to sell more worming tablets and dog food is because he or she wants to make more money to buy a larger car. Besides, we are veterinarians and our duty is not to sell anything, but to make animals better. It might be partly right that the partner wants to make more money, but there are many expenses in a veterinary clinic that makes

obligatory to produce money. We have to understand that there is nothing wrong on making money with your job easing and preventing the suffering of animals. If you do not want to make money, your career should be headed towards the charity work, but even in that field you will see how control of the expenses is necessary to help as many animals as possible. Partners should share the real cost of running a veterinary clinic (rent, light, water, taxes, salaries...) so the whole team knows why they need to improve the cross-sales.

The aims of a company (and a veterinary clinic is one, we cannot forget this) are three, to satisfy the clients, to produce benefits and to keep employees happy. The three of them are as important as each other. You cannot have happy clients, with unhappy vets and nurses. With unhappy clients, you will not produce benefits. Unfortunately, mostly of the times, partners only focus on keeping the clients happy and forget about their employees. Vets in general forget about the three of them as because their duty and obligations are for the animals.

We have to understand that a healthy profitable business, will be better for the animals, as it will remove stress from the partners and pressure to their employees as they will be able to pay the bills and salaries. Client service will improve from longer consults, for example, which comes from less pressure to see as many clients as possible to make as much money as you can. Good business management is important and despite how difficult it is, to embrace this change is necessary. The 10 minutes appointment culture (or see as many clients as you can) it is a huge burden for the profession. Clients want to feel important, vets want time to do a proper consult and partners want to have benefits. With longer consults, the service is better and, in my experience, the client satisfaction improves. This client satisfaction equals also a shorter time until the next visit, so shorter time until next income.

I believe that when a vet behaves as a professional that is his or hers best presentation letter. On the other hand, I do also believe that the vet is not an acting professional vet all the time and many of them do try to run a business without having any training on it. Ethically, you would not allow yourself to perform a surgery that you have not trained or practice before, but somehow, we can run a business from day one after opening the front door. There is people that spend years learning about marketing, accounting, human

resources... and we think that our knowledge of the dog's anatomy qualifies us to be a good manager for a clinic. It is a huge responsibility to run a veterinary practice that might fail because it can mean loss of jobs for many people. Even if the business does not fail, poor management can demotivate vets, which end up dropping their careers or suffering from mental issues like depression, addictions...

In the same way, there is not an ethical problem when a vet works for a drug or pet food company and endorses certain products as far as these do fit within certain qualities that then sells to her or his colleagues (Not to mention doctors which have been doing this for a long, long time), it should not be a problem to do the same in the consult room for example. In my opinion, we do have to open our minds to the world of management. To be a vet is not only a profession, it is a way to pay your bills as well. Many of the problems that are facing this profession at the moment (mental and drugs issues, dropping careers...), do relate with the fact that with the excuse of being a vocational career and the ethical implications, we forget about the human side of it. To manage a veterinary practice it is as important as a good diagnosis or surgery; but we choose not to learn about it. We need to embrace the change in the sector and use the same techniques that our competence. To deny the fact that pet-shops, supermarkets and the internet shops are using top marketing advise and we, as vets, do build up a wall of ethics to prevent us to use them as well when selling the same products is to give us a huge disadvantage. We cannot be our own worst enemy and move into the 21st century.

We are all bi-polars and if we are not yet, we should become this way. We should learn that there is not a problem on trying to sell more things to our clients in an ethical way as far as they benefit their pets. Pet-shops nowadays do sell vegetarian dog and cat food. Dogs and cats belong to the order carnivora, they are meat eaters (or omnivores according to other sources). I will not dwell on it, but I will try to explain how they came up with this idea. The modern companies do not produce products that then try to sell to us, but they find niches in the market and try to full-fill the expectations generated by the potential clients. The niche in this case are pet owners which are vegetarians. This way of thinking comes from any school of business. How are we going to compete with them just by being professionals? We are professionals when working as vets, but when we are selling products, we need to use the same techniques that they use. We have to understand also that our competence are supermarkets and pet-shops and not other vets.

They sell products as we do, but they have some advantages regarding prices, location...
How to overcome those challenges is a job for a manager.

As a summary, if we want to survive as a profession, we need to become bi-polars and understand that to sell preventive treatment, good quality pet food, etc is good for the pets as well as the business and a good business is good for the pets and the vets.

[1^](#) Basco, Monica Ramirez, The Bipolar Workbook: Tools for Controlling Your Mood Swings, [ISBN 1-59385-162-6](#), 2006. p.viii