



The Vet Gazette

EpiPens and Pets

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The prices of medications continue to rise nationally. These increases do not just affect people; they also affect our pet population. One such medication that has recently been in the news and that has risen significantly is the EpiPen. Many pets that have allergies similar to humans. A common example is a bee sting. A pet that gets stung by a bee can go into shock without a prompt dose of life-saving epinephrine. Many people view their pets as members of the family and they will do whatever it takes to take care of them. Unfortunately, caring for our furry friends can be much more expensive because many pet owners do not have health insurance for their pets. With some pets, allergies can be deemed a pre-existing condition; therefore, the medical problem is ineligible for health insurance.

Pet owners will spend nearly \$63 billion this year on pet supplies, food, toys, veterinary care and medications, according to the American Pet Products Association. Millennials are spending more and lavishing even more attention on their pets than the baby boomers did. However, very few people buy pet health insurance. Frequently, it is overlooked that many animals require the same prescription drugs as people. This makes pet owners vulnerable to the same prescription price increases that make healthcare so frustrating and expensive for humans.



EpiPens are receiving the most attention currently for their price increases, but many other medications are jumping up in price too. Approximately five percent of dogs will experience a seizure at some point in their life, which can require generic phenobarbital, the same drug that humans take for seizures. The price for a two-month supply of phenobarbital pills has recently increased from \$85 to \$140. This is a price jump of approximately 65%. EpiPen does not currently have a generic available; therefore, patients have to pay whatever price Mylan Pharmaceuticals Incorporated, the drug manufacturer, is currently charging. The company has been criticized for raising prices more than 500% since acquiring the rights to the injector in 2007.



Over all, most pet-specific medications have tended to hold fairly steady with prices generally rising in tandem with inflation. Pet insurance can help cover prices for medications, but only approximately 1.6 million of the estimated 150 million household dogs and cats nationwide were insured as of last year; that is less than 1%. Pets can be very expensive and the United States Pharmaceutical system was not designed with pets in mind. With the steady increases in pet medication costs, pet owners have become more shopper savvy. They make a point to shop around for the best prices, mostly online, rather than paying higher prices that a veterinary clinic might charge.

According to a recent CNBC report, each EpiPen contains about a dollars' worth of epinephrine. With the soaring prices and necessity of the medication for both humans and pets, hospitals and veterinarian clinics are finding alternatives to the EpiPen. If pet owners are willing, veterinarians can prescribe a small vial of epinephrine to keep in the refrigerator along with a syringe for administration. It takes very little instruction from the veterinarian to be trained properly in the technique for injection. The only downside to this less expensive alternative is that the vial of epinephrine may not last as long as an EpiPen; therefore, pet owners may need to see their veterinarian multiple times a year to keep their product within the expiration date. Another problem that may occur is that in some states, it may not be legal for the veterinarian to dispense epinephrine this way.

Veterinarians and veterinary pharmacists can help pet owners immensely by being aware of their state laws and legislation and having a willingness to instruct pet owners on EpiPen alternatives. Dispensing epinephrine in individual dosing syringes can help customize the medication for veterinary patients; providing a much less expensive option. There may also be some generic epinephrine auto-injectors coming onto the market for human patients, which means veterinary epinephrine generics are not too far off.

