

# New Columnist FUSES PASSIONS FOR Surgery, Writing

By Dawn Bonker, for Veterinary Practice News

**F**or veterinary surgeons, it's always about the cutting edge. New procedures, techniques and technology are constantly changing and improving the field. Alas, for busy practitioners it can be challenging to make time to sift through the research, studies and clinical trials and focus on what's most useful.

That's a niche Dr. Phil Zeltzman, a diplomate of the American College of Veterinary Surgeons, hopes to fill with his new monthly column, which begins this month in Veterinary Practice News.

"We're all overloaded with information. We all are guilty of stacking journals on our desk," Zeltzman says. "I'm hoping to save veterinarians time and still bring in the gist of what I think they should know. Zeltzman plans to fill it with valuable information for general practitioners and surgical specialists.

While surgery is Zeltzman's passion, writing runs a close second. A native of Paris, France, a graduate of the University of Liege School of Veterinary Medicine in Belgium, the Pennsylvania veterinarian is widely published in France and North America. In addition, he maintains a website [www.drphilzeltzman.com](http://www.drphilzeltzman.com), and free newsletter, both aimed at delivering the latest news and thinking in veterinary surgery.

He is, he admits, a bit of an information junkie. "What fascinates me is that when I open a surgery journal I find a study that addresses a specific problem," he says. "And I read this and think, 'Well, this is so obvious. I'm not sure why we haven't always done that.' And that's the beauty of surgery. It's a never-ending quest for improvement."

He has also been aggravated in recent years as pet owners have turned to unreliable Internet sources for veterinary advice.

"I created this website because I get really frustrated when clients end up on unreliable websites or personal blogs or chat rooms and they get really, really bad advice and they get some information that is misleading," he says.

He happily relates the tale of one non-medical reader who found his website and read a piece about the higher incidence of breast cancer in unspayed dogs and cats. The woman told a colleague about the story and urged her to examine her Rottweiler. While they spoke, another colleague overheard the conversation and thought it might be a good idea to check her dog as well.

Uncannily, both dogs had masses and underwent immediate surgery. Good prognoses were expected for both. The thankful e-mail letter relating the story is a point of pride for Zeltzman and is posted on his website among many others.

"I don't want to think for the whole profession, but I

know that some vets keep rehashing things they've done or mistakes they've made," he says. "But these types of thank-you notes are what bring me back up."

Such zeal is typical of Zeltzman. As a child, his parents always said no to pets, but the animal-loving kid who adored watching episodes of "Flipper" and "Daktari" never gave up and "after years of begging" finally wore them down and landed himself a cocker spaniel. After graduating from Liege in 1993, he entered general practice in Paris but immediately set to work on finding his way to a surgical specialty.

His journey began with an internship at the University of Georgia and eventually put him in residency at the Gulf Surgical Referral Service in Buffalo Grove, Ill., near Chicago.

Now he is a staff surgeon at Valley Central Veterinary Referral Center in Whitehall, Penn. In addition to his board certification, Zeltzman is also certified to perform tibial plateau leveling osteotomy surgery.

Among the topics he plans to address in his column are ACL injuries and repair, physical rehabilitation, anesthesia, osteosarcoma, arthritis management and treatment, human medical research useful to animal medicine and obesity, a particular concern of his.

Many of his patients would never end up on his table but for the medical problems brought on by obesity.

"Everybody knows it's as common in dogs as it is in people," he says. While he's involved in some anti-obesity projects, reality dictates that at least some of his columns will have to address the logistics and protocols for treating, anesthetizing and operating on obese animals.

"Obesity makes their surgeries much more difficult," he says.

Pain management is another of his interests. New surgeries are ever more successful and rehabilitation a key component to recovery, but pain relief needs to be part of the package, too, for best recovery, Zeltzman says.

Zeltzman expects to never lack for ideas, as he hopes to hear from readers as to what they want to read about.

"Hopefully, I'll get some feedback or suggestions," he says. "I'm not interested in writing about topics that don't address their concerns."

Neither is he terribly interested in stirring up controversy. Great debates may rage over certain surgical proce-



Dr. Phil Zeltzman is a board-certified surgeon at Valley Central Veterinary Referral Center in Whitehall, Penn. He produces a weekly newsletter from his website, [www.drphilzeltzman.com](http://www.drphilzeltzman.com), which educates subscribers about various topics of veterinary medicine.

Zeltzman is an avid writer for such prominent French veterinary magazines as *La Semaine Vétérinaire* and *Le Point Vétérinaire*.

dures or techniques, but Zeltzman says he doesn't endorse the wholesale adoption or rejection of any tool available for the job.

Even one of his own preferred specialties—TPLO—may not be the first choice for all patients. Some surgeons favor the nylon suture technique that mimics the original ACL.

"We have to be honest with ourselves and acknowledge that we just don't know what the best technique is," he says. "I don't think that one is better than the other. I think it's a matter of indications. And just like other areas in veterinary medicine, there's a place for both. To me it's like arguing whether a CAT scan is better than an MRI. Neither one is better. It's just a matter of indication."

But Zeltzman understands the need to debate. That patient on the table and the client waiting for the results are, of course, the very dear reasons every veterinarian gets up in the morning.

"We aren't working for world peace," Zeltzman jokes. "Our goal obviously is to help patients, but always with the idea that we're helping their owners as well. That is not an earth-shattering idea.

"Any vet who has been dealing with an old lady whose only connection to life is through her pet knows it's extremely important work. I don't want to sound too profound, but if the column is practical for the reader, it's hopefully going to help the patient."

And Zeltzman says he is excited to get started.

"I'm happy as a clam. And I'm aware that not very many people can say that. My job is my passion. My work is my passion." ●

Read Dr. Zeltzman's debut column, "Surgical Insights," on Page 20.