As we enter into May, we are all ready to shake off the wintertime blues and enjoy the beautiful spring weather. May is Mental Health Awareness Month, and those who know me know this holds a special place for me. In 2019, the Philadelphia Inquirer interviewed me about rates of suicide within veterinary medicine. The article touches on the stressors of the profession and the emotional toll we are all under daily.

Two simple changes I have made that have vastly improved the quality of life for both me and my staff are: (1) to stop and sit for lunch every day, (2) leave on time most days. I feel veterinary medicine as a culture frowns upon these simple changes, and we as an industry need to be better to ourselves. Although I am grateful for my experience at AMC (Animal Medical Center, Manhattan, NY) in the ‘Garvey’ days of double shifts and long hours, I am glad that the colleagues after me did not have to endure what I did.

In addition to our own mental health, I want to touch on the mental health of our clients. As an oncologist, I am reminded daily about our clients’ intense bond with their pets. I make the time to understand this bond. There are statements that make me take a little extra time with these clients, like when they tell me the pet belonged to a deceased loved one or that this pet helped them through a hard time, also if it is their first pet as an adult.

I was recently interviewed about a sad case in NJ where a woman was found hoarding cats and dogs in her truck. I have had clients who are animal hoarders, and I wanted to try to shine a light on hoarding as a mental health issue rather than a malicious deed. We all have our private struggles; it is important to withhold judgment even when it is hard to and try to see their side.

Please take a moment to reflect on not only your mental health but also your staff and clients this month. Take the extra time to make sure that you are compassionate and understanding to those around you. It will be returned to you in gratitude.