When the general public lauds veterinarians as heroes through the pandemic, you must understand they mean ‘veterinary medicine.’ That includes you. You are often the person running out of the office – maybe even in the rain – to retrieve dogs and/or cats and/or other species from the car.

Sure, the client says he or she doesn’t have COVID-19, and indeed that client may not today demonstrate symptoms, but maybe tomorrow will. Or may be a carrier of COVID-19 unknowingly. Depending on where your practice happens to be, that may not be likely – but it’s possible.

It is impressive how practices all responded around the country similarly. It’s as if practices from New York City to San Francisco emailed one another about what to do. Eventually, guidelines from were released, and those have been helpful.

But here’s what happened: Veterinarians and technicians/nurses simply recall their education and training. Dealing with infectious disease and potential zoonotic issues is understood.

Meanwhiles, as cities and counties closed down around the nation to “shelter in place,” veterinary practices (and pet stores) were mostly considered to be “essential businesses” and allowed to remain open.

I instantly texted State Senator Sara Feigenholtz, who worked with colleagues to ensure veterinary practices (and also pet stores) would be included on the essential list. It turns out they apparently weren’t on the list – but within an hour that all changed. They likely weren’t left off the list with intent, it’s just that apparently no one thought about it. And decisions were being made quickly. A few hours later in his remarks when announcing that Illinois will shelter in place, Governor Pritzker even mentioned veterinarians.

The American Veterinary Medical Association has undeniably taken a leadership role, often in conjunction with the Centers for Disease Control – so they are messaging consistently. Similarly, the World Small Animal Veterinary Association has been consistent with the World Health Organization. The problem has been the Internet, from (in truth) veterinary professionals signaling incorrectly touting (for whatever the reason) misinformation and disinformation spreading from people with no credibility, though still many buy into what they’re saying – because it’s there to read and because folks have been scared.

No matter, veterinarians are a part of this story in other ways.

Feline infectious peritonitis or FIP is an outcome of the otherwise benign enteric feline corona virus and has always thought to have been fatal. As I happened to write about in my last Journal column, it was recently discovered that a treatment may work using a drug that is nearly identical to Remdesivir, that’s the drug mentioned in a press conference on March 19 by U.S. Food and Drug Administration commissioner Stephen Hahn and President Donald Trump as promising to treat COVID-19. Remdesivir was originally created for Ebola.

Distinguished professor Dr. Niels Pederson, legendary researcher at the University of California, Davis School of Veterinary Medicine has been chasing a solution to FIP for many decades. A few years back he approached pharmaceutical company, Gilead Sciences, with a hunch about using its antiviral drug—GS-441524—to combat FIP. This compound is nearly identical Remdesivir.

GS-441424 proved to be undeniably successful for cats with FIP in clinical trials.

Pedersen says, “Remdesivir is the form of GS-441424 that Gilead Sciences has chosen to use in humans for COVID-19 and is now in clinical trials in China, USA and several other countries. Remdesivir is what is known as a prodrug. A prodrug is
Steve Dale, CABC, has been a member of the Winn Feline Foundation Board of Directors for thirteen years. Steve is a founding member of the CATalyst Council, and serves on the Board of Directors of the Human Animal Bond Association. He’s a contributor to several books including The Cat: Clinical Medicine and Management, edited by Dr. Susan Little; and Treatment and Care of the Veterinary Geriatric Patient, edited by Dr. Mary Gardner and Dr. Dani McVety; and he edited Decoding Your Dog, authored by members of the American College of Veterinary Behaviorists. Steve is the host of three radio talk shows, and he speaks at veterinary and animal welfare conferences around the world. His website is www.stevedalepetworld.com.

ABOUT STEVE DALE

Will Remdesivir be the magic bullet to treat COVID-19 as GS-441524 can be in some cats? Time will tell.

As all this unravels, there’s little doubt regarding veterinary involvement.

From my desk to yours – for your dedicated and generally unrecognized commitment for doing what you do – thank you!