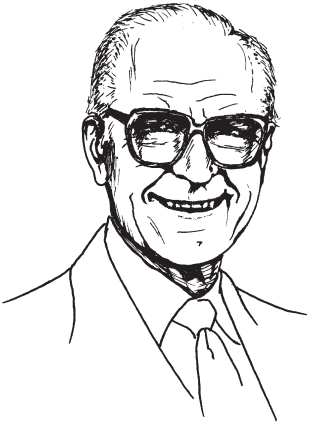


From My Armchair: W. W. Armistead



Communication

In earlier times, the medical professions thought it wise to keep patients in the dark as to the details of their illnesses and treatments. Similarly, when I entered veterinary medicine in the 1930s, the custom was to explain as little as possible to clients. Secret prescriptions were dispensed, and placebos were widely used. The aim, presumably, was to preserve the mysteries of medicine and strengthen the aura of wisdom about the veterinarian, but also, it must be admitted, to prevent clients from learning enough to diagnose or treat their own animals. This approach also helped to disguise medicine's many scientific shortcomings. In those days, the art of practice was as important as the science.

But times have changed dramatically. The public is more knowledgeable about drugs and health matters in general. Today's better educated veterinarians recognize that an informed client is a better client—better able to understand the patient's problem and the rationale of treatment, better able to minister to the patient during convalescence, and better prepared to accept an unfavorable outcome. Time spent in explaining the patient's ailment and treatment is time well spent, an investment in the client's trust.

W. W. Armistead