

REFERRING VETERINARIAN

Dr. Michael Johnson

Read Between the Lines

“Pets can’t talk and tell us how they feel, so we have to read between the lines,” Dr. Michael Johnson of Willowbend Animal Hospital in Wichita, Kansas, said. He feels his role is vital in determining the quality of pets’ lives by finding commonly undetected pains. Every patient is potentially suffering from pain, which owners may not notice. Dr. Johnson and his team are committed to ensuring their patients are healthy, pain-free and enjoy a high quality of life.

Dr. Johnson began to develop this commitment to pets as a child. His love for animals grew and, despite any significant exposure to veterinary medicine growing up, he always knew he wanted to be a small animal veterinarian.

Dr. Johnson attended veterinary school in his home state of Iowa, graduating from Iowa State University in 1993. After graduation, he moved to Kansas and began practicing in Olathe. A couple of years later, Dr. Johnson moved to Wichita and, just two years ago, opened Willowbend Animal Hospital.

Dr. Johnson’s staff may be small, but he said the team of four is excellent and very well trained. “I worked with them for a very long time before opening Willowbend. Our clients love them as much or more than me,” Dr. Johnson said.

While still relatively new, the hospital has experienced success with its small animal practice. Dr. Johnson attributes a portion of the success to word of mouth. “We grow because we are honest with people and people like us,” Dr. Johnson said. “Our goal is to provide the best healthcare for each pet we see. We keep it simple.”

Dr. Johnson focuses on the basics for many of his clients: brushing teeth, preventive medicine and education. “I take every opportunity with a pet to look at that pet’s overall health and I try to go over every issue,” he said. “We are very thorough and honest with people. I think that is why we are growing and successful.”

Dr. Johnson’s passion for managing pain drives his practice. “I think it’s often underemphasized with pet owners. It’s not always obvious pets are in pain,” he said. “Sometimes they are restless at night or panting and that can indicate pain. So that’s one of the quality-of-life issues I feel strongly about. Dental pain and cognitive dysfunction are others. Unless you ask or tell an owner to look for it, you may miss it, and they live the rest of their life with pain that could be alleviated or eliminated.”



Every time a pet comes through the door is an opportunity to find something that is hidden, according to Dr. Johnson. “If we find there’s an issue, then I go over the options with the pet owner,” he said. Sometimes he says those options involve advanced medical care.

“I’ve been referring cases to the VHC for 20 years and I have 20 years of trust built up with the VHC,” Dr. Johnson said. “I view it as an extension of me - to do things I can’t do that the patient needs.”

Dr. Johnson knows his patients will experience compassionate care while he will receive critical follow-up communication from the VHC. He also appreciates the friendly and knowledgeable voice in VHC’s referral coordinator, Marsha Roblyer, when he calls. “I feel part of practicing good health care is referring when it’s needed. I’ve had good success referring to all of the services.”

Dr. Johnson has built his practice on being thorough, uncovering health conditions and disguised pain, to provide his patients with the highest quality of life. He also knows, when a diagnosis is too advanced to treat at Willowbend, the experts at VHC are willing to lend a hand. ▼