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*Clover Connection*

By: Kate Pittack, Extension 4-H Agent

“Can I help you?” said the pharmacy technician. “Yes, I’m here to pick up a prescription for my cat, Max.” I must admit, I felt silly getting medication for my pet at the human pharmacy. Many of us have taken the drug azithromycin for bacterial infections. I know it’s my go-to when I’m battling a sinus infection. Come to find out, it’s pretty common to use it for pets too.

While the drug is not actually approved for use in cats and dogs by the United States Food and Drug Administration, veterinarians have permission to use it “off-label” for their feline and canine patients. So, what does “off-label” (also referred to as “extra-label”) use mean?

Extra-label use is defined as: the actual use or intended use of a drug in an animal in a manner that is not in accordance with the approved labeling. This includes, but is not limited to, use in species not listed in the labeling, use at dosage levels, frequencies, or routes of administration other than those stated in the labeling, and deviation from labeled withdrawal time based on these different uses. (U.S. Food & Drug Administration).

Whew, that was a mouthful. All of that means that veterinarians are allowed to prescribe extra-label uses of certain approved human drugs for animals under certain conditions. In the case of my pet, Max, it involved using a “human” drug, azithromycin, for his upper respiratory infection after an animal-use antibiotic gave him stomach issues.

In order for a veterinarian to be able to prescribe your furry friend (or even your show animals for all those 4-H & FFA exhibitors out there) a medication that will work best it’s important that you have an established veterinarian-client-patient relationship (also referred to as VCPR).

I’ve come to terms with the fact that when I call/go in to my vet clinic the staff is probably thinking “here comes that crazy cat lady!” I’m glad the staff and vets know me and my pets. Having that VCPR helps my “kids” get the best possible care.

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