

# The Economics of Avian Medical Care

by Don Winter, Maitland, FL

**M**edical care for your birds is expensive. This article is going to try to convince you to spend even more on medical care. Two basic subjects will be covered here; choosing an avian vet, and setting up a health insurance plan for your bird flock.

Granted, you may not live in an ideal area for choosing an avian vet; but, let's assume you have a plan and a willingness to drive an inconvenient distance if the benefits warrant. In other words, I might set up a routine whereby a local vet is used for routine procedures and another for more complicated problems. I would try to resist the urge to switch vets back and forth for a specific bird. And, vets are human. It would probably not be wise to let either vet realize you were using some kind of "grading system." Luckily, my vet of choice is nearby.


You want a multiple avian vet practice that charges enough money to do the job right. Usually a vet with a reputation for being expensive is actually the vet you want to use. I want his profit picture to be substantial so that he will have the inventory of supplies I need at a moment's notice; and be willing to buy that fancy new equipment, like a laser. Hopefully, your vet also attends AAV meetings MARE and/or AFA conventions.

Once, you have your vet selected and have developed a relationship, outline your overall financial philosophy so that neither of you will be unpleasantly surprised. I did not start out this way but, I did sit down with my vet and explain to him that each bird, regardless of value, would be treated on a cost-no-object basis. If the bird was in a great deal of pain, and the likelihood of correcting the problem a long-shot then, rather than put it through the ordeal of

treatment, we would put it to sleep. However, economics would not be the decision maker. This discussion minimizes miscommunication. I know that nothing will be omitted because I failed to request it for the bird. I won't have to reevaluate my values each time a decision involving money arises. I know that each time I am faced with a large vet bill there is no guarantee that I will not have another right away. That is life and there is no reason to cry over it.

Now, on to my medical plan. First it doesn't quite work out for two or three birds; but for, say, five or more I am betting it does. If I add up all my vet bills for a given year, and divide the total by the number of birds I own and divide once more by the 12 months in a year, it comes out that I pay about \$2 - \$3 per bird per month for a self-funded health plan that allows me this cost-no-object philosophy. I think that is very fair and an inconsequential amount of money, given the fact that I elected to take on the responsibility of so many birds. Recently, I spent \$300 on tests for a Nanday Conure and nothing turned up. The bird still shows suspect symptoms which may simply be behavior. I refuse to re-analyze the decision. The money was well spent. I may have to do the same thing again for a Sun Conure. I am fully convinced, I own a lot of birds that would otherwise be dead.

I know people are sensitive about money. They are guarded about spending it foolishly and getting nothing in return. But, that is reality. Cars depreciate. Your electricity is long gone when you pay the bill. And on and on...

It is not money spent foolishly just because the results are not positive. It is life. This is not a lecture about managing your overall finances. Only *you* can decide how big a flock you can manage economically and how well you want to maintain their health. 

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