

Look Before You Leap Online Internet Pet Pharmacies

(From *The Tennessean*, April 29, 2003)

These days you can buy just about anything from the Internet, even medicine for your favorite feline friend or your loyal canine companion. Online pet pharmacies promise convenient home shopping with big savings. But while some of these Web sites do offer slightly lower prices for certain medications, many brands are just as expensive — sometimes even *more* expensive — as those found at your local vet.

Take for example, a card of six Sentinel heartworm tablets. Brentwood Animal Clinic charges about \$40 for this medication. PetMed.com lists the same product for \$56.60, not including shipping. 1-800-PetMeds.com offers free shipping, but their price is still higher — \$59.99.

“I prefer to buy from my veterinarian, even if lower prices *are* available online,” says Lisa Lewis, owner of an aging cocker spaniel (Bonnie). “I like the idea of supporting my vet. Part of his business depends on those sales.”

Lewis could have saved a few dollars by purchasing Bonnie’s Heartgard tablets at 1-800-PetMeds (\$34.99, compared to her vet’s price of \$38). However, her cat’s Revolution (all-in-one heartworm, ear mite, flea medication) costs only \$90 at her veterinarian’s office, while 1-800-PetMeds lists it for \$99.88.

There is more to consider than just cost when shopping online. Beware of companies touting “alternate veterinarian programs.” These pharmacies will offer to write a prescription without requiring a physical examination. Not only is this practice illegal in most states, it can put your pet at risk.

Other online pharmacies cut costs by selling drugs that are not U.S.-approved. These medications have different labeling and formulations (kilograms rather than pounds, etc.) which can be confusing, therefore leading to possible incorrect dosages.

Be prepared to do some homework before buying online. You may find yourself spending more time surfing than you would driving that five miles to your local vet.

—Virginia Roberson
Special to The Tennessean Classifieds

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