

every visit. The Committee developed a global initiative to promote nutritional assessment as the '5th Vital Assessment' which should be considered at the standard physical examination along with temperature, pulse, respiration and pain assessment.

The WSAVA also launched a nutritional toolkit which includes practical aids for the veterinary healthcare team to make nutritional assessment and recommendations more efficient, such as a diet history form, hospitalised patient feeding guide, body condition score charts and calorie recommendations for dogs and cats. (For more information, visit www.wsava.org.)

VETS SERVE AS A VITAL SOURCE OF SCIENTIFIC EXPERTISE

As a veterinarian in a pet nutrition company, Dr Magelakis from ROYAL CANIN® said: "Veterinarians within a pet nutrition company are strong advocates for the health and wellbeing of pets and serve as a source of scientific expertise both internally and externally. Part of my role is to ensure that vets in practice feel supported and informed. Our focus is keeping nutrition top of mind for vet professionals as nutrition is an integral part of general health and wellbeing and is also key in managing certain medical conditions."

Like other pet food companies, Royal Canin® also provides access to peer-reviewed research and external scientific resources and expertise. The company also hosts a webinar series and other events for veterinary professionals, with content delivered by other industry experts.

"We firmly believe that each veterinarian has a choice to recommend a diet that is appropriate for their individual patient, meets the client's expectations and of course, is one the pet finds palatable!" said Dr Magelakis.

Nestlé Purina Pet Care Australia – having 12 brands and hundreds of products ranging from dry and wet foods to functional dog treats, and accessories - also works with veterinarians to educate pet owners about nutrition. Earlier this year, the company launched The Purina Institute at the Companion Animal

Nutrition (CAN) Summit in the U.S.

The Purina Institute will be the voice of the company's science, representing more than 500 Purina scientists and pet care experts working worldwide, said Mr Hill from Purina.

"The Purina Institute will provide veterinarians with science-based, user-friendly facts and information that will support them in their nutrition conversations with pet owners," he said. "Specifically, the Institute will promote nutritional discoveries in key areas at the forefront of Purina's ground-breaking research, facilitate knowledge-sharing and collaboration amongst global veterinary and scientific thought leaders, and host conferences such as the CAN Summit."

Mr Hill agrees pet food companies must work in partnership with veterinary experts in educating pet owners about nutrition.

"Both vets and pet food companies bring their own specialist expertise to the goal of ensuring happy, healthy pets – and it is critical that we work together," he said. "There are good systems in place to ensure that the potential for conflicts is managed. When we work with vets, we find them to be intelligent and discerning professionals who are aware of the risks and keep their eyes on what is best for animals."

WHAT CAN THE INDUSTRY BUILD CONSUMER CONFIDENCE?

Dr Magelakis said she understands consumers are really doing their research before choosing a diet to feed their pets and actively seeking more detailed information from pet food manufacturers.

"We receive enquiries regularly relating to the environmental sustainability of the ingredients we use in our diets, right through to the specifics of our packaging and transportation processes. These are questions that are closely tied to consumer values, and pet food manufacturers need to remain transparent to allow pet owners to make informed choices about what they will feed their pets," she said.

Also, with the pet food industry growing exponentially in recent years with the emergence of many brands and ideas on what is nutritionally best for cats and dogs, "the focus for the pet industry needs to be on the science of nutrition,

given pet food trends often parallel the popular diet trends seen in human food," she continued.

"Across the pet food industry and online, the amount of choice that pet owners now have when searching for a diet for their cat or dog can be overwhelming. Conflicting nutritional messages can also leave pet owners feeling unsure about what is best to feed their pet," she said. "The challenge for the industry is to educate pet owners to seek diets from reputable manufacturers producing diets that are both nutritionally balanced and safe to feed."

Like other world leading pet food companies, Nestlé Purina Petcare Australia aims to support pet owners by providing "complete and balanced nutrition that contains everything their pet needs, so they can feel confident in their choices," said Mr Hill.

He shared how Purina works to succeed in a changing, competitive marketplace.

"Consumer expectations and preferences evolve over time and have been changing more rapidly given the diversity of our cultures and society. For any industry to succeed and thrive in a shifting landscape, it needs to adapt to these changing preferences to remain relevant, and pet food is no exception," he said.

Purina adapts by first focusing on the nutritional and health needs as the foundation for all new product development, he added.

"Any products we bring to the market begin with the following tenants in mind: excellent nutrition should be available and accessible to all cats and dogs; great nutrition starts with an understanding of nutrients and not just ingredients; innovation should always be pursued by first focusing on the pet's nutrition needs, and safety and well-being," said Mr Hill.

This approach has led to some significant innovations for pet food companies like Purina, such as diets that aid in the cognitive function of aging dogs or carry dental authority seal of approval for reducing plaque and tartar in dogs.

"We've spent the last 80 years building our trusted reputation, and we go the extra mile to make sure it stays that way for the next hundred years. To us,