A
fter almost 30 years of actively practic-
ing veterinary dermatology and being
involved with clinical research and con-
tinuing education (CE), we are more inspired and
excited about the specialty than ever. When we
started our careers in the late 1970s and early
1980s, the number of recognized skin diseases
was limited; now, more than 460 varieties of
skin disease are recognized.1,a We have seen
the number of American College of Veterinary
Dermatology diplomates grow from just around a
dozen to its current total of 212. And we continue
to be amazed at the development of new diag-
nostic and therapeutic tools, such as video oto-
scopes and cyclosporine, which have improved
our ability to manage many common problems.

Many surveys have found that dermatology
cases are the most common presenting complaints
seen in small animal practice.2–4 A February 2009
Veterinary Pet Insurance press release reported
that ear infections, skin allergies, and pyoderma
were the top three canine claims in the United
States for the year 2008.5 Based on our opportuni-
ties to consult in a variety of geographic regions,
we would agree.

Knowledge about veterinary dermatology is
expanding worldwide, through meetings such as
the annual 3-day North American Veterinary
Dermatology Forum, the Annual Congress of the
European Society and College of Veterinary
Dermatology, and the World Congress of Vet-
erinary Dermatology, which meets every 4 years
and is the result of interaction between inter-
national dermatology specialty groups. These
meetings allow study results, descriptions of new
diseases or therapies, and new information about
recognized diseases or therapies to be presented
to a wider audience.

Academia, private practice, and industry have
all contributed to the growth of, and increased
interest in, veterinary dermatology. Advances in
diagnostics and therapeutics have benefited spe-
cialists and general practitioners alike in helping
manage the most common presenting skin and
ear problems. Clients are demanding higher levels
of care and often actively pursue advanced diag-
nostic testing and therapeutic options. In order to
remain current, practitioners need to take advan-
tage of CE seminars and the valuable information
published in the veterinary literature.

The following are a few of the recent develop-
ments in veterinary dermatology:

❯❯ Advances in the understanding of canine
atopic dermatitis. Once believed to be an
inhaled type 1 allergy, this condition is now known
to be a complex reaction to allergens that may be
percutaneous, inhaled, or ingested. Genetic pre-
dispositions to altered immunologic reactivity, as
well as skin changes, predispose patients to the
clinical manifestations. This knowledge is open-
ing up new avenues for treatment and, hopefully,
prevention of this common problem.

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Increased accessibility to in vitro allergy testing for atopic dermatitis, which has resulted in more pets receiving allergen-specific immuno-therapy.

Advances in dermatopathology and immunohistopathology as tools for diagnosing and understanding disease pathogenesis, thereby promoting the development of improved therapeutic and management techniques.

Use of lasers in a variety of therapeutic modalities for inflammatory and neoplastic skin diseases.

New pharmacologic agents, including systemic and topical parasiticides, antimicrobials, and topical therapeutics with improved delivery systems.

Greater understanding of the role of nutrition in skin structure, function, and disease, which has led to improved dietary options for managing many dermatologic problems.

Greater understanding of the pathogenesis and management of feline and equine skin diseases.

The adage “as long as you can use glucocorticoids, you can be a veterinary dermatologist” has never been further from the truth. In reality, veterinary dermatologists specialize in how to avoid or decrease systemic glucocorticoid use. We encourage all general practitioners to attend CE meetings and stay current with the veterinary literature to be kept up-to-date with this amazing, ever-expanding specialty.

References