An app for your pets

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"Pet obesity is a people problem. Animals aren't providing themselves with too much food," says Loren Sri-Jayantha.
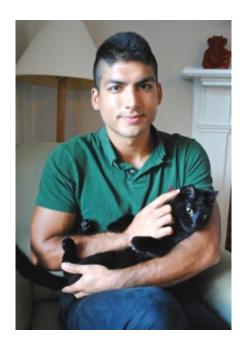
Cummings School veterinary student Loren Sri-Jayantha lived with three people, three cats, two red-footed tortoises and a geriatric reptile known as a bearded dragon this year. "With a house full of veterinary students, you'd think all the pets would receive top-of-the-line care. Instead, we'd unintentionally over-feed them sometimes," he says. One adorable, 20-pound orange tabby would routinely con several meals from his multiple caretakers.

To make sure the menagerie stuck to their recommended diets, Sri-Jayantha, V17, enlisted two software engineers, his older brother, Darren, and Alejandro Ciniglio, to help him develop PetSync, an app that coordinates and tracks veterinary visits and routine pet care—including a feeding schedule for animals in households with multiple caretakers. The app is a handy organizational device for any pet owner or for a pet sitter who needs routine care instructions or emergency medical information.

The app can help pet owners fight a preventable but serious disease, Sri-Jayantha says. "Pet obesity is a people problem. Animals aren't providing themselves with too much food," he says, "but if a Lab ends up with a ton of food in its bowl, it's going to eat it all without stopping to think about how it's going to look in a bathing suit."

Although the technology was developed to solve a specific problem, its appeal is universal: PetSync is one of eight finalists in the inaugural Veterinary Innovation Challenge, a global entrepreneurship competition for veterinary students.

Loren Sri-Jayantha with one of his charges. Credit: Hayley Nordstrom

The innovation challenge, started by veterinary students at the University of Pennsylvania, will award $10,000, $5,000 and $2,500 to the three top business proposals chosen by a panel of veterinary industry leaders. The eight finalists, selected from a field of 22, had three months to develop business plans and meet with industry leaders for advice on refining and pitching their inventions. They will make their final presentations to the judges on Sept. 6 in Philadelphia.

Competition founder Nikhil Joshi, a fourth-year Penn vet student, came up with the idea for the challenge after listening to a talk by a founding investor in a pet insurance company. He received funding from the school and from AVMA-PLIT, the American Veterinary Medical Association's insurance arm, to launch the competition.

"I realized that there's all this innovation occurring in the veterinary industry, particularly around pet insurance and primary care, but most of it isn't coming from veterinarians," says Joshi. "It's coming from people who have a mind for business." He hopes the competition will encourage more veterinary students to pursue their big ideas.

Submissions to the challenge included several apps for pet owners and veterinarians, a new technology for treating a common orthopedic injury in dogs and a hands-free method for transporting medical syringes to treat cattle, livestock and pets in the pasture.

With their business plan shored up, Sri-Jayantha and his team developed a web-based version of PetSync that the judges can demo on any device. Their mentor—Mary Gardner, co-founder of Lap of Love Veterinary

Hospice—became a veterinarian after working in software development and went on to found several online companies.

Entrepreneurship certainly appears to be contagious. "This app is a jumping-off point for us," Sri-Jayantha says. "We hope to add physical products that integrate with it, such as ways to manage pet feeders remotely and services like pet food delivery."

 More information: petsync.co/

Provided by Tufts University

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