

# Stop hiding patient care “in back”

**W**hile consulting at one practice, I observed client after client challenge receptionists over fees for exams and other professional services. The high-volume hospital performed exams, gave vaccines, and delivered other services in the treatment area in the interest of efficiency. Conducting professional services behind closed doors left pet owners questioning charges. Some even wondered whether their pets were really vaccinated.

To create the perception of value and improve client education, I persuaded the doctors to deliver services in front of clients in exam rooms. Client complaints immediately stopped. As 65 percent of people are visual learners, delivering patient care that engages pet owners can go a long way.<sup>1</sup> Is it time for you to stop hiding veterinary care?

## Verbalize your physical exam

Once you begin the nose-to-tail exam, describe every step, giving clients play-by-play details as you cover each body system. If you engage in small talk during the physical exam, pet owners may assume you're just petting their animals, rather than assessing their overall health. Tell the client, “For your pet's physical exam, I will assess 12 areas, including eyes, ears, nose and throat, teeth and gums, coat and skin, heart, abdomen, limbs and paws, urogenital system, lungs, gastrointestinal system, and weight.” Then start the guided tour of the client's pet.

Let children listen to their pets' hearts through your stethoscope. You'll show kids the cool science of veterinary medicine while inspiring future responsible pet owners.

## Explain diseases you're protecting against as you vaccinate

When vaccinating a dog for leptospirosis, ask risk-assessment questions and explain how the bacterial infection is spread. This shows clients you tailor vaccines toward individual patients.

## Use teaching tools

The exam room is your classroom. When you're an effective communicator, you can increase acceptance for professional services and products. Replace artwork of dogs and cats with framed posters on frequently discussed topics of heartworms, age analogy charts, and parasite prevalence maps. Use models, websites, dry-erase boards, X-rays, handouts, exam report cards, and videos as teaching tools.

Let's say you advise a pet owner to give subcutaneous fluids to her cat to treat its

kidney disease. Rather than administering fluids in the treatment area, demonstrate it in the exam room. Tell the pet owner, “Let's give your cat fluids together today, so you will know how to do it at home. You're welcome to record a video on your smartphone for reference. I also will text you a link to our hospital's YouTube video on how to give fluids. Giving your cat fluids three times per week will keep her hydrated and let us better manage her kidney disease together.”



**BUSINESS BUILDER**

Wendy S. Myers, CVJ

## Invite clients to look in your microscope

An ear cytology reveals a cat's ear mites. Rather than returning to the exam room to explain your diagnosis, tell the client, “Come with me. You've got to see these ear mites.”

When she peers into your microscope, the pet owner exclaims, “Those look like monsters! No wonder our cat was scratching its ears.” You've shared behind-the-scenes magic while guaranteeing compliance for treatment.

## Show pet owners where procedures will happen

From discussing dental treatments to orthopedic surgeries, boost clients' confidence in your procedures with a quick tour. Walk clients through your in-house laboratory, treatment area, and surgical suite. Also post a virtual tour on your website. Half of the family may be present for today's exam and other caretakers can see the same tour online.

Seeing where procedures will be performed may comfort clients who have a fear of anesthesia. Clients will be impressed with the cleanliness and sophistication of your surgical suite. Many may tell you, “Wow, this looks just like a human hospital!”

After presenting the treatment plan and completing the tour, ask, “What questions can I answer about your pet's dental



Jennifer Lavallee, DVM, owner of The Cat Specialist in Castle Rock, Colo., lets *Veterinary Practice News* columnist Wendy Myers watch when her cat's cardiac ultrasound is performed. “She discusses findings and shares ultrasound images. As a result, I'm a compliant client,” Myers said.

procedure and our anesthetic protocols?” The phrase “what questions” invites pet owners to share concerns or get more information. This wording is more effective than the yes-or-no choice of, “Do you have any questions?” Once you've provided answers, ask clients for commitments to treat. Say, “Do you need more information, or have I explained enough for you to decide?”

If emergency care is being delivered in the treatment area and you can't do a tour now, have photo books or digital slideshows of procedures. Take a photo of each professional service listed on your treatment plans, from your in-house lab to patients receiving nursing care during recovery.

## Let clients watch care being delivered

Laser therapy can be performed in exam rooms with clients present. Seeing treatments helps them understand its benefits and book ongoing therapy.

Clients may be able to observe certain workups. My cat, Caymus, has cardiomyopathy. Jennifer Lavallee, DVM,

owner of The Cat Specialist in Castle Rock, Colo., lets me watch when she performs his cardiac ultrasound. She discusses findings and shares ultrasound images. As a result, I'm a compliant client. Consider which procedures and treatments would be appropriate for your clients to witness. Obviously, you don't want bystanders hovering in your surgical suite or interrupting emergencies.

## Banish the phrase “in the back”

You can see clients' tense reactions when they hear these words. Pet owners may become anxious about what will happen to their animals behind closed doors. Explain where and why patient care will happen, such as “I'm going to take your cat to the treatment area where another technician will assist me in collecting his urine sample. We'll return in about five minutes and start the urinalysis, so you have results during today's exam.” Replace the negative “in the back” phrase with “treatment area,” which is more professional and accurately describes your facility.

Demonstrating the quality and compassion of your care in front of clients will develop trusting relationships while increasing compliance. ●

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## REFERENCE

<sup>1</sup> Klingbord J. Exam Room Communication for Veterinarians. AAHA Press. 2011;27, 29, 160-162, 34-35.

➤ [VeterinaryPracticeNews.com](http://VeterinaryPracticeNews.com)

