

Chapter 2 - Lesson 2



Client Communications

Introduction

The veterinary assistant is often the first person to make contact with veterinary clinic clients. Client communications form a very important part of a successful veterinary practice. A professional veterinary assistant should have a clean, neat appearance and a courteous, caring attitude to make a good first impression. The veterinary assistant should always be eager to please the client.

Because the veterinary assistant is often the first persons to make contact with a client, he/she has the potential to make the first impression of the professional care and quality standards of the clinic. All staff, including the veterinary assistants, should always be aware and act accordingly with the knowledge that the animal owner (i.e., the customer) is not obligated to visit any particular clinic. The animal owner makes a conscious choice about who will be their veterinarian, and their loyalty to the clinic is dependent in large part on the care, competence, courtesy, and compassion demonstrated by the staff.

The Telephone Call

The veterinary assistant needs to answer the telephone as promptly as possible, preferably by the third ring. Often, clients will hang-up if the phone is not answered within three rings. When answering the telephone, client communications must be kept friendly and professional. Often owners will call to ask questions regarding their animal's health, over-the-counter products, such as shampoos or dips, or to make an appointment to see the veterinarian. If unsure of an



Young animal owner.

answer to a question, the veterinary assistant should not hesitate to ask the veterinarian for help.

One of the main jobs of the person answering the phone is to provide courteous assistance to the person calling. The veterinary assistant should never give the impression that they are too busy to talk to the client.

If the client wishes to speak with the veterinarian, the veterinary assistant needs to write down the client's

name, phone number, and a short message describing the nature of the call. This will enable the veterinarian to evaluate the urgency of the call.

Occasionally, a client must be put on hold. Whether the veterinary assistant is waiting until the veterinarian can speak to the client, looking up information, or asking the veterinarian a question, the assistant should: (a) let the client know what is happening, (b) check back with the client every minute or two if they are on hold to let them know they are not forgotten, and (c) never place the client on hold for over three minutes without checking on them.

The Office Visit

Client communications include facial expressions and mannerisms. A warm, friendly attitude is as important as a well-groomed appearance. When clients enter the clinic whether for an appointment, to purchase products or medicines, or to visit with the veterinarian, they need to be greeted with a warm, friendly, welcome, and caring, professional attitude. This will usually initiate a positive visit and make the client feel welcome.

Occasionally, a client may be difficult. When dealing with rude, demanding clients, it is best to remain calm and courteous and not argue with them. Usually, this calm approach will keep a situation from getting out of control, and the customer will calm down. If a client continues to be difficult, then the veterinary assistant must ask the veterinarian for assistance. Remember, the assistant should never argue with a client, as this will only make the situation worse.

A veterinary assistant's professional appearance will always give the client a good impression. Clean, neat clothing and well-groomed hair communicate a concerned attitude. If assistants care enough about their appearance, they will probably care about their jobs and convey that attitude toward clients and their animals. Remember that good client communication skills are essential for making a good first impression.



Interacting with the client.

These skills involve appearance and attitude, as well as the ability to communicate with people. If the client is satisfied, then the assistant has done a good job.

References

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- Lee, F. (2004). *If Disney ran your hospital: 9 ½ things you would do differently* (6th ed.). Bozeman, MT: Second River Healthcare Press.

Questions

1. What are the important aspects of good client communications?
2. What should you do when placing a client on the telephone on hold?
3. Why is it important that the veterinary assistant have a clean, neat appearance?
4. How do you handle a difficult client?