

OWNERS KNOW THEIR PETS BEST - IN THE CONSULT ROOM, START WITH WHAT THEY TELL YOU

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In the age of Dr Google, our clients are increasingly looking online for the answers to their pets' health care needs. Self-diagnosis and consulting with Internet forums and / or local paraprofessionals such as groomers, catteries, pet shops etc. are also likely to have taken place before the owner calls you or sets foot in the practice. All of which means that they are likely to be a little confused about what is best for their beloved pet. The very worst thing you can do is compound this confusion with your website giving different advice to your reception team, or your vets telling clients to just 'wait and see what happens in the next few days'. If an owner has contacted you, it's because she needs help, and the professional team at your practice should be best placed to give it. Clear advice and a consistent approach improve compliance with treatment regimes and help bond the client to the practice through a relationship of trust. Everyone in the team needs to be singing from the same price sheet!

Perhaps the most important part of the client journey through your practice is their experience in the consult room - this is after all what they are paying for. In the course of our ongoing research programmes, Onswitch speaks with countless pet owners each year. When we ask them about the things that frustrate them when visiting the vet, a consistent theme is the sense that the vet is not quite giving their full attention to the case in hand - leaving the room mid-consult to collect equipment or medicines that should have been ready given the nature of the appointment, typing up notes with their back to the client and pressing on with a theory without collecting background information from the owner.

Ten or fifteen minutes isn't a long time for a consultation, especially when it's a new patient or a new presentation. Yet it is perfectly possible to carry out an effective and engaging consult within this time when structure, process and empathy are applied.

Onswitch train and promote use of the 7 Steps - a simple and clear set of guidelines to help vets and nurses deliver superior consults, developed from the Calgary Cambridge model used in medical schools across the world. The model is based on the principle of building an open and trusting client / clinician relationship through a standard process - asking for information and listening to the client, collecting evidence through a physical examination, explanation of findings, recommendation and planning of next steps, followed by a decisive close:

1. Prepare yourself (make sure the room is clean and tidy, and the items you're going to need are close at hand - owners hate it when you leave the room mid-consult so read the notes and remind yourself what the patient is in for)
2. Create a rapport (introduce yourself, make eye contact, listen actively, engage in conversation and use the pet's name throughout)
3. Ask open questions (what, why, how - questions that require elaboration rather than a yes / no answer)
4. Carry out an obvious pet examination
5. Make clear recommendations (don't use phrases such as "I think..." "Perhaps we could..." and "let's wait and see...")
6. Check understanding and signpost next steps (studies show that compliance is good when owner and vet agree on the priority for the patient, but conversely it is poor when the vet does not address the owner's initial concern)
7. Book the next appointment / contact

Onswitch's monthly national ConsultTrack reporting tool measures consultation skill performance across the UK, with latest data showing a national average rating of just 38% out of a possible 100%. It finds that step six, check the client's understanding and signpost next steps, is consistently the least-used.

In this session we'll look at practical techniques for active listening and creating rapport (both important for building the trust required to develop positive long term relationships). Delegates will also learn how to identify what stage the client is at on the Patient Compliance Progression scale - an awareness of their state of mind and emotional state will help clinicians introduce recommended actions in the most appropriate way.

THE PROCESS OF PATIENT ENGAGEMENT

