

Interacting with Clients Being Responsive

In order to be able to give service to a client, it is critical that we first actually see the client as a person rather than an object or task. When the client is a person to us we automatically care about them and are responsive to their needs. If the client is an object, task, problem, or irritation to us we are always resistant. It is essential that we see every client and patient as a person that we care about and have compassion for. For a more detailed discussion read the article "The Art of Service."

Getting All the Details from the Client

When an animal comes in for an appointment confirm the reason for the appointment. Check in the computer or chart to see if any vaccinations are due or if a fecal is due. If the pet has chronic ailments ask if they would like the doctor to check it. List everything the client has requested on the chart. If dropping off have the client fill out a drop-off sheet with a phone number and try to get as much information about the health concern as possible:

What is the concern? How long? How severe? When does it occur?
Where specifically on the pet? What alerted the owner? Any vomiting, diarrhea, coughing or sneezing? Any change in activity, appetite or water consumption?

Anxious Owners

Be sympathetic but in control. Reassure the client by saying, "I understand how you feel. We will take excellent care of your pet. The doctor will call you as soon as the procedure is complete and you can call in for updates."

Most importantly, ALWAYS make sure to tell the client who is helping them, what happens next, and the time frame we are dealing with.

Giving Information to the Client

Cost Estimates

Giving accurate estimates is the easiest way to avoid misunderstandings at the time the patient is discharged. Cost estimates should be made at the time the client comes for the office call and schedules the procedure. If you are not sure of the surgery cost do not guess. Ask the doctor to prepare an estimate.

Payment arrangements need to be handled before treatments are performed on the pet. At discharge settle the bill at the front desk before the pet is brought out. If the discharge instructions are not routine ask a technician to come out and go over the instructions with the client. Always ask the client if they have any questions.

Grief Counseling

Death of a Pet

Be sympathetic and compassionate with the client but not overly emotional. You need to take care of the details surrounding this unhappy event and control the situation. First, have the client bring the body in. When they arrive it is necessary to determine if the client wishes private or regular cremation. With private cremation the ashes are returned to the owner. With regular cremation animals are cremated together.

Euthanasia

The decision to perform euthanasia is between the doctor and the client and depends on the nature of the illness or the severity of the injuries. An owner may ask if you think the pet should be put to sleep. Your response should be, "Euthanasia is a serious decision that you should discuss with the doctor."

The only additional step to those for a pet to be euthanized is to prepare a room for the client in advance with a blanket and some tissues. Have the client sign a "Euthanasia Consent Form," determine which type of cremation they would prefer and type of payment.

The Grieving Client

Support Lines

Pet Loss Support Hotline at UC Davis

916.752.4200

AAHA Grief Brochure

SASE to Member Service Center, P.O. Box 150899, Denver, CO 80215

303.279.2500

Children's books

The Tenth Good Thing About Barney by Judith Viorst (Aladdin Press)

When a Pet Dies by Fred Rogers (G.P. Putnam's Sons)

The Unhappy Client

Not everyone is happy all of the time. Occasionally there will be a client who marches into the reception and targets you, the client care specialist, as the person responsible for their unhappiness. When someone shouts at you your natural reaction may be to shout back or to run. Don't do either. Most unhappy clients want to be heard. It is your job to listen without getting emotional, understand the client's problem and try to remedy it.

Empathetic Listening

In order to handle any conflict situation in which the person you are dealing with is emotional, it is always best to take the person into a private room and engage in a technique called 'Empathetic Listening.' The purpose of this technique is to allow the upset person to express all issues causing their emotional state. When people yell or argue it is due to frustration that you are not hearing what they are saying. If you do

nothing but listen and understand, the person will calm down and become more rational. The steps to empathetic listening are as follows:

Take the person into an isolated room where the opinions of bystanders are not an issue.

Drop from your thoughts any preconceived notions about the situation or predetermined solutions.

Say "Please explain to me what is the matter."

Listen, listen, listen. Don't think of your response just listen.

When the person is done explaining, explain to them your understanding of the situation as you heard the person tell it. If you are off at all, allow the person to clarify and re-explain. Repeat these steps until both of you are completely satisfied with your understanding.

Take a moment to consider the other person's perspective, and then explain your concerns and needs.

With both perspectives known, explain how you will proceed with everyone's needs satisfied.

Empathetic Listening works because it removes the emotion from the situation and fosters understanding and rational decision making. This technique should be used every time you encounter a conflict or difficult situation with anyone.

Always document in the chart the discussion and its resolution.

What Makes a Client Unhappy?

Every time a client is unhappy, it is a sure bet that we violated Quality, Integrity, Compassion, or Service. It is critical that you are willing to accept responsibility for the satisfaction of our clients. If you accept responsibility and are willing to admit failures, you have the power to fix and control the situation. Clients' concerns should always be taken seriously and may never be attributed to the deficiencies of the client's character.

When clients are dissatisfied, they may or may not voice it. It is your responsibility to make sure the clients are always very satisfied with our care and service. Clients sense dissatisfaction of the following types:

Dissatisfaction with the service due to:

The client's perception of an uncaring attitude on the part of the hospital staff toward the client or the pet.

Failure of the clinic staff to perform all the services the client wanted.

Failure to complete a service to the client's satisfaction.

Unwanted results of a service.

Dissatisfaction with the cost of services

Quoting one cost and charging another. This dissatisfaction is best avoided through good communication.

Failure of the client to perceive the value of the services rendered.

When to Walk Away

Occasionally there will be a situation that you feel is beyond your powers of reasoning or out of your control. Remember the ultimate goal in dealing with an unhappy person is to retain the person as a client. If you are not making any headway it may be necessary to call in the doctor or a manager. Always brief the manager or doctor about the situation.

When the Unhappy Client Is on the Phone

You should handle a caller the same way you would someone in the waiting room. Be communicative, be understanding. Follow the steps to identify the problem and resolve it.

Note: An unhappy client is actually doing us a favor. Rather than taking their business elsewhere they are letting us know why they are dissatisfied and giving us the chance to improve.

Application Exercises:

When and why do we provide estimates?

Describe how to handle a euthanasia.

Describe Empathetic Listening.