



Small Animal Practitioner's Symposium Summary

Increasing Your Feline Business

In 2011, roughly 45% of cat-owning households DID NOT visit the veterinarian, a number that has not improved since. Dr. Karen Felsted, CPA, MS, DVM, presented strategies to increase feline business in veterinary practice. There are many reasons cat owners fail to bring their pet to the vet; the stress of travel, the cost of veterinary care, failure to see the need for veterinary care and the belief their cat doesn't like the vet are just a few. But there are many opportunities for veterinarians to encourage their current clients to return and to attract new cat clients.

Firstly, Dr. Felsted asserts that veterinarians should proactively go after feline business. The mantra "Every client, every time" reminds veterinary offices to ask all their clients if there are any other pets at home. Or ask directly about cats that have not been seen in over a year. Additionally, veterinarians can educate their current clients on ways to make the pet carriers more attractive and travel easier. Dr. Felsted suggests sending travel information to clients as soon as an appointment is made.

Making a cat friendly clinic requires minor changes that yield big results. Overall, separating cats from dogs, using softer light and minimizing noise are principles to employ in all areas of the clinic. In the reception area, a screen can be used to create a separate cat area away from canine clients. Feline appointments can be grouped to decrease exposure to dogs. And "Happy Kitty" towels can be provided that have been sprayed with synthetic pheromones. Cats can be wrapped directly in the towels or the towels can be used to cover the carriers.

Specific exam rooms should be designated "cat-only" with warmed towels and synthetic pheromones diffusers. Cats should be allowed time to adjust to the new environment. While performing the exam, approach cats slowly; and stroke and talk to them quietly. Examine the cat where it wants to be examined and use minimal restraint. In the hospital and in boarding areas, cats should be separate from dogs and cats should not face other cats. Smooth, reflective surfaces should be avoided

and pheromone towels should be placed inside cages. Clients should be allowed to bring personal bedding or toys from home.

Finally don't lose the opportunity to be the expert. During exams, describe your actions and findings as you go and use clear, unambiguous language when making recommendations. Be sure to ask if clients have any additional questions or concerns at the end of the visit and follow-up with a post-visit phone call to make sure everything is going OK. Many of Dr. Felsted's suggestions required minimal financial investment but they produce a material difference in the experience feline patients and clients have in your clinic.

