

## Study Reveals How Veterinarians Communicate With Clients

**A recent study shows that veterinarians communicate differently in problem vs. wellness appointments.**

*By The SmallAnimalChannel News Division*

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Wellness appointments and problem appointment elicit two different responses from veterinarians, according to a study by the Argus Institute.

Veterinarians communicate with clients differently in problem appointments — those in which veterinarians are discussing pet health threats — versus wellness appointments, according to a new communication study by the Argus Institute at Colorado State University.

In wellness visits, veterinarians tend to focus on building a relationship with their client, the study revealed. This includes engaging the client as an active partner in caring for the health of their pet, so the pet owner participates in the visit and has an opportunity to voice his or her opinion.

The study showed that veterinarians also communicate with a different tone, including more social talk, laughter, reassurance and compliments.

In problem appointments, however, veterinarians focus predominantly on medical topics. The tone reflects stress as some veterinarians are perceived as hurried and some clients as anxious and emotionally distressed, according to the study.

When a paternal communication style is used during problem appointments, there is a potential for negative consequences that could impact pets, clients and veterinarians, the institute reported.

“We know that paternalism is not an effective of an approach for gaining results,” said Jane Shaw, DVM, Ph.D., director of the Argus Institute. “Without engaging the client in a conversation about their pet and obtaining their opinion, they aren’t as likely to follow through on home care. They also are not as likely to build a strong relationship — and subsequent loyalty — to their veterinarian.

“To achieve successful results veterinarians can empower their clients as partners by supporting their emotions, understanding their expectations and reaching a mutual agreement during problem appointments as well as during wellness appointments.

“Society is changing, animals are regarded as family members, and clients expect a different level of service from the veterinarians. People want to interact with their veterinarians and be a part of their pet’s veterinary care.”

A strong relationship with a client improves a veterinarian’s ability to gather accurate and complete information and diagnose the problem, according to the institute. Adherence to at-home care recommendations are also improved when veterinarians encourage the client to participate, negotiate and share in the decisions.

To help clients open up during appointments, Shaw recommends that veterinarians ask open-ended questions. These may include: What questions do you have? What options have you considered? What will be the most difficult for you?

Shaw also encourages veterinarians to explore their client’s life in a broader context during problem appointments. This may help them gain a better understanding of the pet’s illness, she said.

For instance, veterinarians should consider the degree of the client’s attachment to the pet, their financial resources, whether or not they are the primary caregiver to their pet, and life events that may impact the pet’s health, such as the birth of a child or death of a family member.

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