

Team based care - utilising nurses in the consult room in a team approach

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Thank you for the opportunity to speak today about our journey at Vets On Riverbank in incorporating a team-based approach to our veterinary care.

In 2017 we were a two FTE small animal veterinary team, struggling to keep up with an ever-increasing workload. I and the other companion animal vet were discussing our next steps, and the usual option of another vet came up, when we wondered if we couldn't make ourselves more efficient by getting a nurse to shadow us all day and help streamline our workload.

We had noticed when one vet was away and the other therefore had access to more nurses, we were able to get much more work done, so what we called at the time "nurses in consults" was born.

It was much more comprehensive than that, as the nurses shadowed us all day, and helped keep the veterinarian's day progressing and running smoothly.

This approach has led to several major advantages for both veterinarians and veterinary nurses in our practice, as the nurses become active and contributing members of the healthcare team, not just during surgery or for inpatients, but during consults as well.

It is an important, yet often an underappreciated aspect of veterinary care—having veterinary nurses actively involved in consultations alongside veterinarians. In recent years, the role of veterinary nurses has evolved significantly, and they are now more integral than ever in delivering comprehensive care for our patients. Today, I'd like to focus on the key advantages of having veterinary nurses present during veterinary consultations, not just as support staff, but as active and contributing members of the healthcare team.

Enhancing the quality of care

One of the most significant advantages of having veterinary nurses present in consultations is the improvement in the overall quality of care for both patients and clients. Veterinary nurses are trained to assess patients from a nursing perspective, focusing not only on medical interventions but also on patient comfort, emotional support, and behavioural well-being.

Veterinary nurses bring additional skills to the table, particularly in handling nervous, anxious, or aggressive animals. They are experts in patient restraint, offering calming techniques that can make the consultation process less stressful for pets. This improves the experience for both the animal and the owner, which can lead to better compliance with treatment plans.

Moreover, veterinary nurses are often adept at recognising subtle clinical signs that might not be immediately apparent to the veterinarian, providing a fuller picture of the patient's health. Their observations can aid in accurate diagnoses and help formulate more effective treatment plans.

Continuity of care

The continuity of patient care provided by having a veterinary nurse work with one veterinarian throughout the entire surgical process offers significant advantages for both the patient and the team.

When a veterinary nurse is involved in every stage of care - from admitting the patient, to monitoring them during surgery, and finally assisting with their discharge - the nurse develops a comprehensive understanding of the animal's condition, progress, and unique needs. This consistency allows for better communication and more tailored care, as the nurse is familiar with the patient's history, response to anaesthesia, and any potential complications. The relationship between the nurse and the veterinarian also fosters seamless collaboration, ensuring that the animal receives consistent, high-quality care throughout the day. Additionally, this approach helps reduce stress for the animal, as they are in the hands of a familiar caregiver, promoting a smoother recovery process and enhancing overall patient satisfaction.

Improving client education and communication

Another key advantage of having veterinary nurses involved in consultations is their ability to improve communication with clients. Veterinary nurses excel in client education, and by having them present during consultations, the veterinarian is supported in conveying critical information in a clearer and more thorough manner.

It's one thing to explain a diagnosis or treatment plan to a pet owner; it's another thing entirely to ensure they fully understand it. Veterinary nurses often take the time to break down complex medical terms and concepts into layman's language. They can demonstrate procedures, offer clear instructions on medication administration, and provide advice on aftercare. This can improve owner compliance with treatment recommendations and ultimately contribute to better patient outcomes.

Additionally, veterinary nurses often act as a reassuring presence for clients. In stressful or emotional situations, such as when a pet is diagnosed with a serious condition, a veterinary nurse can offer support, answer questions, and provide comfort. This creates a stronger, more trusting relationship between the client, the veterinary team, and the practice as a whole.

Increased efficiency in consultations

Veterinary consultations can be fast-paced, with a range of tasks and procedures to complete in a limited amount of time. By having a veterinary nurse present, much of the routine but essential work can be handled simultaneously, allowing the veterinarian to focus on diagnosis, treatment, and discussing the medical aspects of the case.

For example, while the veterinarian is discussing the treatment plan with the client, the veterinary nurse can be preparing medications, ensuring the patient is comfortable, and taking additional notes. This collaborative approach makes consultations more efficient, reducing wait times and ensuring that patients receive prompt attention.

This shared workload also helps prevent burnout among veterinarians, who often face high caseloads. By having a veterinary nurse handle certain tasks, veterinarians can devote more of their time and energy to the clinical aspects of care, which ultimately benefits the practice's productivity and profitability.

Strengthening the veterinary team dynamic

Incorporating veterinary nurses into consultations fosters a more collaborative, team-based approach to veterinary care. It emphasises the importance of a multidisciplinary team working together toward a common goal: the well-being of the patient.

Veterinary nurses bring specialised skills in areas such as anaesthesia, diagnostic testing, and laboratory work, which allows them to offer valuable insights and suggestions during consultations. Their training in nursing care

and client management complements the veterinarian's expertise in diagnostics and treatment. This synergy not only improves patient care but also enhances the working environment by promoting mutual respect and collaboration among team members.

Furthermore, the presence of veterinary nurses in consultations helps to elevate their role within the practice. It emphasises the growing importance of their professional contributions and recognises their expertise in a more visible way. This recognition boosts morale and job satisfaction, which in turn enhances the overall performance and success of the practice.

Supporting preventative care

Veterinary nurses are often at the forefront of preventative care initiatives, such as vaccination programmes, wellness checks, and parasite control. Having a veterinary nurse present during consultations provides an opportunity to emphasise the importance of these measures to pet owners.

Veterinary nurses can assist in discussing the significance of regular health checks, early disease detection, and maintaining a healthy lifestyle for pets. They can also monitor long-term care plans, ensuring that owners are adhering to recommended preventive measures and alerting veterinarians to any concerns that arise during follow-up consultations.

By working alongside veterinarians in these scenarios, veterinary nurses help strengthen the practice's focus on prevention, contributing to the long-term health and well-being of the animals under our care.

Improving job satisfaction and retention

Including veterinary nurses in consultations can have a significant impact on their job satisfaction and retention within the profession. Many veterinary nurses are passionate about being more than just support staff; they want to be an active part of the medical decision-making process and have a meaningful impact on patient outcomes.

By incorporating them into consultations, we acknowledge their skills and expertise, providing them with a sense of purpose and fulfilment. When veterinary nurses feel valued and recognised as key members of the healthcare team, they are more likely to stay in the profession and remain committed to delivering high-quality care.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the integration of veterinary nurses into consultations and being part of the entire surgical process with veterinarians offers numerous advantages. It enhances the quality of care for our patients, improves communication with clients, increases the efficiency of consultations, strengthens the veterinary team dynamic, supports preventative care, and boosts the satisfaction and retention of veterinary nurses themselves.

As the veterinary profession continues to evolve, it's crucial that we recognise and fully utilise the skills and expertise of our veterinary nurses. Their presence in consultations is not just a support role—it's a partnership that benefits the patient, the client, and the entire veterinary team. By working together, we can ensure that the highest standards of care are met, and that our patients and their owners have the best possible experience.

Thank you.

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