

The Suprelorin® WEBINAR SERIES

Speaking at Virbac's webinar series, 'veteran' veterinary practice partner Dr Claire Stevens, BVSc. (Hons) Cert. VPH and founder of training provider Global Vet Solutions talked running a small animal practice in 2021 - what it takes and what keeps clients coming back.

How small things can make big differences in small animal veterinary medicine

Is the age of the 'fur-baby' fuelling more informed clients?

"Many pet owners have adopted pet parenting behaviours that mimic traditional parent-child relationships," explained Dr Stevens, "that's one of the reasons why they come into the consultation more empowered than ever."



A new breed of pet parenting in 2021:

Business should be booming as Australia has one of the highest pet ownership rates



On average, dog owners are spending **3-4 hours** with their dog per day - likely more during COVID-19.



25% take their pets with them on holidays.



Around **2/3 owners** speak to their pet as if they understand them.



There is a **shift** away from purebreds to mixed/designer breeds.



While most vets consider themselves good communicators, client surveys don't always agree.



"Refining your communication skills, both verbal and non-verbal is important for small animal vets to continually work on. Client-centred care not only helps strengthen the bond between you and your client, it can result in better outcomes for the patient as well as pet owners become engaged, cooperative and compliant,"

noted Dr Stevens.

How would you handle this case?

Julie is a 60-year-old, female, homosapien who has visited after the clinic sent out a desexing reminder for Rusty, her 1-year-old entire male Dalmatian. Julie is a health-conscious empty nester who wants the best for her boy Rusty, but doesn't want to leave her dog in the hospital for a day or put him through surgery.

“What Julie decides to do is influenced even before your conversation begins,”

explains Dr Stevens.

Dr Steven's 7 steps to the perfect consult

1 First impressions

“Consider your body language and how you greet Julie and Rusty. Smiling, showing warmth and openness can help Julie feel comfortable enough to open up about her reservations about surgical desexing. Be an active listener. Don't get distracted by the computer or dog, make eye contact with Julie and encourage or acknowledge the points she makes.”

2 Show empathy

“This one's a key factor in building and maintaining rapport with clients. By tuning into Julie's feelings, you can show you understand where she is coming from in not wanting to put Rusty through a desexing surgery.”

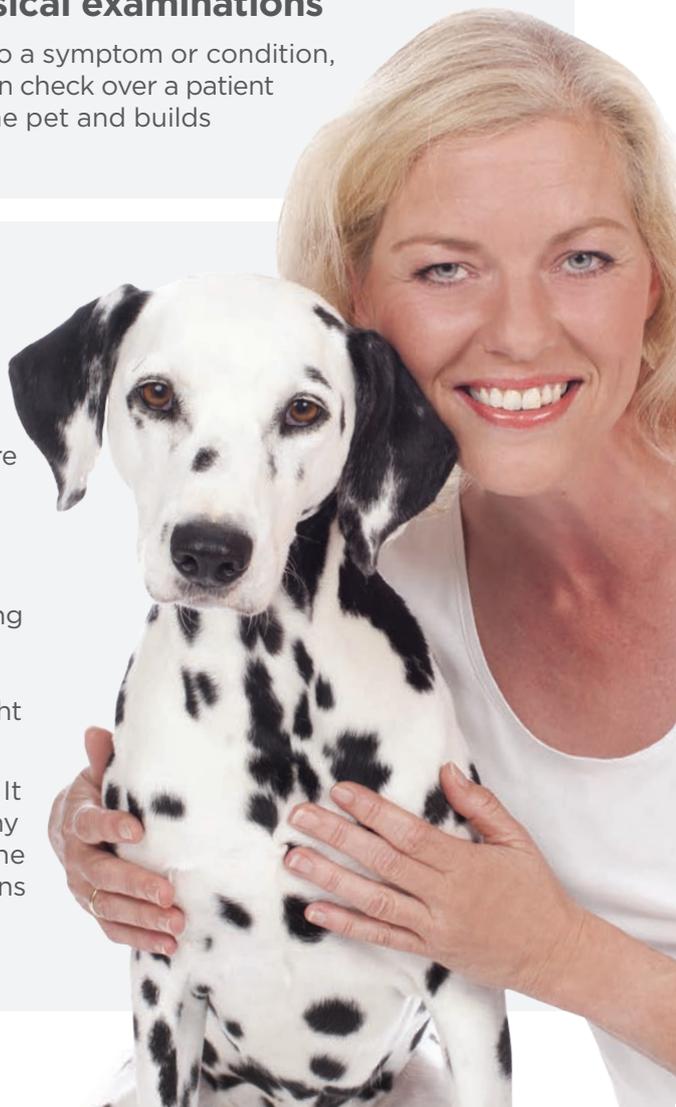
3 Be thorough, every time with your physical examinations

“Even in this case, where the reason for visit is not due to a symptom or condition, it pays to provide attention. If you're experienced and can check over a patient in moments, exaggerate! The benefit extends beyond the pet and builds a sense of trust and credibility with your client too.”

4 Collaborate

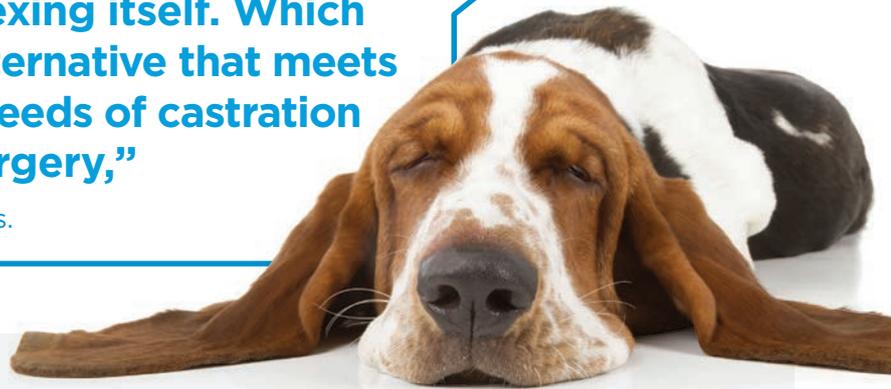
“It's important to consider that no matter how clever you are or clinically correct, if you haven't established the client's ideas and expectations early they can still leave unsatisfied. A simple way to get started is to ask questions. Why have they come to see you today? Is there anything in particular they are worried about? Was there anything else they had in mind that you may be able to help them with? Sometimes our clients tell us their concerns, but we don't listen well. Julie has said she is not keen putting him through surgery. With Rusty, talking through Julie's fears and concerns over surgery rather than a fear or concern of desexing itself can open the conversation about medical castration options that might suit Julie and Rusty better.”

“A collaborative discussion doesn't have to be lengthy. It can be as simple as explaining how you understand why Julie has those concerns and that some dogs do find the process stressful. However, there are some other options that might work well for Rusty, if she is interested in hearing more about that.”



“Using my 7-step approach, we learned that Julie’s aversion to desexing was the stress of surgery rather than desexing itself. Which meant we could offer an alternative that meets the medical and practical needs of castration without the concerns of surgery,”

concluded Dr Stevens.



5

Summarise

“Summarising the discussion shows the client you have listened and is a good check-in that you’ve interpreted the history correctly. In this case, a good point to check in with a summary would be after Julie explains her concerns about surgical desexing. By confirming you’ve understood Julie’s main concern is leaving her dog in hospital and putting him through the stress of a surgery, you can respond to the points that matter most to Julie.”

6

Signpost the consultation

“We tend to conduct consultation in much the same way, but most clients only visit us periodically. With no map of what’s going to happen next or when it might be their turn to share their thoughts or questions, clients can feel confused and distressed. Inform them upfront of what you are about to say or do – first I’ll do a thorough examination and then we can have a chat about options, or I’d like to discuss an alternative to surgical desexing you might be interested in – would that be OK with you?”

7

Safety net

“We know that uncertainty is a constant in medicine and we must prepare for the unexpected. By managing client expectations – communicate possible outcomes to the owner and what you expect them to do in each case – this leaves both you and the client on the same page about next steps.”



Taking a client-centred approach to care means we hear the client’s needs and have a chance to respond to them.

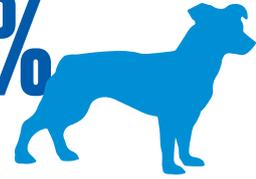
Did you know?

21%



21% of owners of intact dogs want information on castration options²

7%



7% of owners of surgically castrated dogs regret surgical castration¹

33%



33% of owners of intact dogs say medical castration would increase their likelihood of castrating their dog²

17%



17% of owners of surgically castrated dogs would have preferred medical castration²

Dog owners are interested in medical castration²

Survey of dog owners (n=955), November 2016



Control Today, Choice Tomorrow

References: 1. Pet Ownership in Australia 2016. Sydney: Newgate Research and Animal Medicines Australia. Available at: <http://animalmedicinesaustralia.org.au> 2. Data on file, Virbac pet owner survey 2016.

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