The Role and Responsibility of the VN in Educating and Advising Clients on Companion Animal Needs, Care and Behaviour

Abstract
This bitesize lecture discusses the importance of the Veterinary Nurse’s role in taking time to educate and advise clients on the needs, care and behaviour of companion animals. It looks at why this is so important and how it can be achieved.

Learning outcomes
- An understanding in why this role is so important
- Confidence in educating and advising clients on the needs, care and behaviour of companion animals

Course Notes
This lecture will consider the important of educating and advising clients on companion animal needs, care and behaviour.

Why is it Important?

- RSPCA report-People give up on their pets due to lack of knowledge/experience.
- PDSA wellbeing report-Companion Animals suffer due to lack of knowledge/experience.
- RCVS-VNs should put Animal Welfare first.

- A recent RSPCA Report shows that almost 20% of people who bought a puppy in the last two years no longer have the dog.
- This may be down to problems such as a lack of training/control, or lack of understanding of what may help their dog fit into their lives better, such as providing better exercise or diet.
- When owners are giving up their dog so early in its life, support and education may well be of assistance in changing this, and it is here where the duty of the Veterinary Nurse lies.
- Discussing the needs, care and behaviour of a pet, either through clinics or less formal chats, may provide a practical chance to help minimise the possibility of the client giving up the pet, as the statistics show happens so often.
• Indeed, Veterinary Nurses are ideally placed to actively become part of a positive solution to this problem.

• *PDSA Report states: “What is clear is that the UK is a nation of animal lovers; but the affection owners have for their companion animals can be misguided, which is often to the detriment of a pet’s wellbeing. A lack of education and awareness of the health and welfare needs of pets is at the heart of the problem.”*

• The RCVS Code of Professional Conduct states: “Veterinary nurses must make animal health and welfare their first consideration when attending to animals.” It is therefore, our duty to try to educate and advise our clients as best we can in order to improve animal welfare.

So, What can we do?

• Clinics, educational talks, pre purchase/adoption discussions:

  1.) Setting up nurse clinics such as puppy parties and adolescent clinics can help prevent and address behavioural problems enormously.

  2.) Educational talks at the practice and in local schools can help educate people on the needs of pets, and how these needs should be met, such as that rabbits should have companionship and the correct diet for example.

  3.) Pre purchase/adoption discussions for people thinking about the right pet for them can help ensure realistic expectations on choosing the right pet, one that they have enough time, space and money for, for example.

• Waiting room displays & Local media:

  Waiting room displays can be done on a wide range of things, from advertising clinics and educational talks, to basic care and needs of pets.

  And local media such as newspapers or local radio are often interested to be involved in local initiatives or have a veterinary professional involved in answering readers or listeners questions so this is a great way to raise awareness about issues and educate the public about pet care, needs and behaviour, as well as ideal for advertising the practice.
And, What to educate on?

- Basic care & needs & behavioural needs such as:
  - Diet
  - Exercise
  - Suitable environment
  - Handling
  - Companionship
  - Preventative health
  - Training
  - Prevention of unwanted behaviour

By teaching our clients everything they need to know about good standards of pet care, we can set them up as well informed owners of happier pets. Taking the time to do this is beneficial to the pet, the client and the practice.

And, in conclusion, as we can see, as Veterinary Nurses, we are ideally placed to really make a difference and help clients care for their pets properly, understand their pets properly, and enable them to work to ensure their pets have a good life and a high standard of well being under their care.

Through actively making an effort in educating and advising clients whenever we can, we can make a real difference to companion animal welfare in the UK.

References:

- RCVS Code of Professional Conduct
- RSPCA Report, February 2011,
- The PDSA Wellbeing Report 2011