3 WAYS VET NURSES CAN MAKE THEIR CLINIC MORE PRODUCTIVE, EFFICIENT, AND HEALTHIER

Ernie Ward, DVM, CVFT
E3 Management, LLC
Ocean Isle Beach, North Carolina
USA

Why are we so stingy with the time offered to our patients and clients? Most veterinarians don’t allow a meager 1800 seconds to perform an examination. That’s 30 minutes to welcome, examine, diagnose, offer advice, obtain products, review usage and follow-up, invoice the client, and schedule a return visit. Good luck. Time won’t solve all our professional problems, but it highlights where our priorities are. I can’t force you to spend a mere 30 minutes per appointment, but I can suggest some compelling tactics to make each second of your exams more meaningful. Slow is the new fast. It’s time we learn how taking our time in appointments can grow our practices, create value for our services, and bring us happiness. Here are three ways veterinary nurses can make their clinic more productive, efficient, and healthier.

CONNECT HEARTS, MINDS, AND PAWS

First impressions count every time. This means whether you’re meeting a client on the first or fortieth occasion, those first few seconds set the tone for the rest of the visit. Regardless of how hurried, distracted, or overwhelmed you may be, your success with the current appointment is determined by how present you are in that moment. If the client perceives you’re distracted, disinterested, or disconnected in any way, things typically don’t go well. I’d also add that I’ve found if an animal senses you’re not thrilled to be there, they’re less agreeable and often downright nippy.

Before you begin each appointment, know client and pet names, gender, age, pertinent medical history and reason for visit. Being prepared allows you to focus on faces instead of charts. Enter the exam room smiling, relaxed, confident, and grateful for the opportunity to practice your art. Extend a warm handshake, pet the patient, and sit down. I recommend sitting whenever possible to eliminate any potential intimidation, foster intimate communication, and aid attention. Deliberately focus on listening. Too often, veterinarians have diagnosed and decided before asking and examining. I find when I approach exams unbiased, I’m a better diagnostician.

As the conversation continues, pay close attention to the client and patient’s body language. Do they understand what you’re saying and doing? Do they agree? Are they comfortable? If your compliance rates aren’t what you’d wish, chances are your clients aren’t connecting with your advice. Ask questions such as, “Does that make sense?” “What do you think about that?” “Do you think Rover will be okay trying that?” Staying connected means actively engaging and ensuring clients agree with our recommendations.

MAKE COMFORT A PRIORITY

Managing veterinary appointments is tricky because we’ve got to accommodate both human and animal needs. What pleases people may not comfort canines and what comforts canines probably won’t make Himalayans happy. When considering my consultations, I ask, “Is everyone as comfortable as we can make them?”

Train your staff to evaluate animal and human body language as soon as they enter your hospital. Are they stressed, nervous, or angry? If so, have protocols for easing apprehension. Many times a warm smile, gracious greeting, comfortable seating, and offering water, tea or treats can allay most worries. Teach your team to engage in conversation, introduce clients to one another while waiting, and pay attention to the energy and attitudes of clients. Make it your goal to lift spirits instead of avoiding anxiety.
When you interact with your pet patients, critically analyze your movements. Aim to use minimal restraint, be exceedingly generous with treats and distractions, and intensely focus on the pet's responses. You've probably only got about 600 seconds of hands-on contact; make them as pleasant as humanly possible.

COMPLIANCE INSURANCE
You’ve got less than 1800 seconds to connect, comfort, and practice medicine during a standard appointment. Some veterinarians fear if they emphasize communication they may minimize medicine. Not true, if you’re tactical. To help keep my team centered on my patient’s medical needs, we use a variety of single-page examination reports. These reports are divided into the medical history, physical examination, and a checklist of meds, supplies, and services we recommend.

The medical history includes the most common questions we have for wellness visits by species and age, queries for frequently seen medical conditions, and more extensive behavioral assessments. The exam portion highlights our standard physical examination findings by anatomy and organ system, and the checklist ensures clients leave with what they need.

Provide a copy of the report to your client during discharge. Review the pertinent details and highlight areas that need further attention. At the completion of the appointment, make sure to answer, “When will we see you again?” Don’t be afraid to schedule an appointment six months or more in advance. The client can always change it if necessary. Booking future appointments today is an excellent way to encourage follow-up and routine visits. I’m constantly amazed at how powerful this tactic is in practice. Advance scheduling works because most people honor their commitments.

1800 seconds spent wisely on each appointment can be incredibly valuable. Don’t waste them waiting in the lobby or consultation room. Don’t squander them performing a meandering meaningless exam. Don’t fritter them away creating stress and anxiety. Every second we have is priceless. Create daily tactics that guarantee you’re making the most of your most valuable resource – time.