

View From AAHA

Is Becoming a Cat-Friendly Practice Really Worth the Effort?

WHAT'S ALL THE FUSS ABOUT CAT-FRIENDLY PRACTICES?

WE are veterinarians; does it not stand to reason that we are cat-friendly? Do we really need to become certified to effectively take care of cats in our practices? The answer is, surprisingly, that it does matter! For your staff, your clients, and, most importantly, for your patients, becoming a Cat-Friendly Practice certified by the American Association of Feline Practitioners (AAFP) will positively impact the amount and the quality of the care you deliver. It will, ultimately, have a positive impact on the financial bottom line of your practice.

According to the AAHA State of the Industry Report, three important traits are shared among practices that consistently outgrow others. First, the practice staff is very engaged in care delivery, feeling a sense of responsibility for great patient care and personally responsible for client education. Second, growing practices report that their clients are more bonded to their pets than are clients in other practices. Third, growing practices report that they have a tighter-than-average bond with their clients. It is my opinion that becoming a certified Cat-Friendly Practice will help you achieve all three of those traits.

Let's explore how and why your staff becomes more engaged in the care delivery for our feline patients by becoming cat friendly. One staff member in a practice should become the champion of all things feline. From researching which vaccines or medications might warrant a change in hospital protocol to teaching all staff members how to restrain properly, the "cat leader" in your hospital gets to be an agent for change. He or she gets to plan continuing education and implement it.

Cat leaders may spearhead physical changes to the cat room and explain to clients why those changes positively impact their cats. They will teach kitty kindergarten and actively instruct clients why it will make their cats happier and healthier. They will train and re-train staff members on gentle restraint. They get to see that they have an impact on care and care delivery with every single cat patient that comes in purring, rubbing, and climbing all over the staff.

Longer exam times; adding pheromones, roman chamomile, and catnip during exams; and knowing how to get cats in their carriers without a fight can make your clients love your hospital so much they would never consider taking their kitty anywhere else.

You may wonder how becoming an AAFP-certified Cat-Friendly Practice can help bond clients to their own cats. It is simple, really. Clients, for the most part, understand their own pets. Unfortunately, they report feeling embarrassed or silly for imparting the "human emotions" of fear and distress to their cat. They also report "not wanting to scare or stress out their cat" as one of the biggest deterrents to taking the cat to the vet. When we validate clients' feelings and acknowledge that cats have feelings, we strengthen the bond. We let them know that how much they love their cat matters to us and causes us to treat cats better than ever before.

As for the third trait of growing practices, it takes only a few clients watching their cats purring while being examined on a "cat tower" to start an avalanche of good will toward your hospital. Longer exam times; adding pheromones, roman chamomile, and catnip during exams; and knowing how to get cats in their carriers without a fight can make your clients love your hospital so much they would never consider taking their kitty anywhere else.

Pamela Nichols, DVM, opened Animal Care Center in West Bountiful, Utah, in 1999. The AAHA-accredited facility is a Gold Standard Cat Friendly Practice, certified by the American Association of Feline Practitioners (AAFP).

