


Embracing Spectrum of Care in Veterinary Medicine



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& Clinic Experience

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Letter from the Editor



“ The essence of spectrum of care lies in our ability to merge years of accumulated medical knowledge with the act of caring for individual pets and the people who love them; this is where art meets science.

The term “spectrum of care” may have emerged within the veterinary profession in recent years, but the concept it embodies has long been practiced by veterinary teams. As a small animal veterinarian, I can attest that this principle has been an integral part of every single day I’ve spent in the clinic since my first day of practice 13 years ago. The essence of spectrum of care lies in our ability to merge years of accumulated medical knowledge with the act of caring for individual pets and the people who love them; this is where art meets science.

Every day in practice, we are faced with a myriad of challenges that demand flexibility from the ivory tower concepts we were taught in veterinary school. This can be an uncomfortable challenge, because, as clinicians, we want to do everything in our power to deliver the highest quality of care to our patients. But that’s where reality steps in and we are met with varying needs with each case that walks into the clinic, whether they be physical, financial, cultural, or other.

Over the years, I’ve learned that the best medicine for an individual patient is *not* always the one found in the textbooks we spent years studying. Rather, it is the collaborative effort among the veterinary team, the pet, and the pet owner that often leads to the most successful outcome. Not every pet owner will have the financial means or desire to maximize diagnostic testing. Not every pet owner will have the physical ability to care for a pet recovering from surgery. Not every patient can maintain a good quality of life while receiving intensive treatment for chronic disease. Approaching these situations with empathy and understanding is just as important as the medical expertise we bring to the table.

I encourage you to read this collection of articles about spectrum of care and to reflect on how/if this concept shows up in your practice. I believe that the more we explore this important concept, the better we can embrace our calling as caretakers—for both our patients and the people who love them.

Sincerely,

Beth Molleson, DVM

Veterinary Officer, Clinician’s Brief



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Putting Spectrum of Care into Practice

Discover how a flexible, client-centric approach can reduce team stress, improve patient outcomes, and foster stronger client relationships.



Kate Boatright, DVM | Penn-Ohio Veterinary Services | West Middlesex, Pennsylvania

As veterinary professionals, we are intimately familiar with the emotional and financial challenges our clients face when it comes to caring for their pets. Hardly a day goes by when we do not encounter a client who's heartbroken over a pet's illness, struggling to provide recommended treatments and attend scheduled rechecks, or distressed about an unexpected veterinary expense.

The concept of “spectrum of care” (ie, offering clients a variety of treatment options so they can choose what works best for their situation) has become increasingly relevant in addressing these challenges. In fact, in a survey of veterinary professionals, 77% of respondents said spectrum of care is their top area of interest in new research.¹ Although many veterinarians have practiced this way throughout their career, the groundswell of interest and support from the profession is a more recent—and welcome—development.

When we let go of the notion that we are obligated to reflexively offer the “gold standard” in all cases, we are free to provide flexible care plans in a way that prioritizes the needs of the client and the

patient. What's more, this approach can be good for our own emotional health as veterinary professionals. Let's take a closer look.

Discovering Spectrum of Care

My journey with spectrum of care began in 2019 and was driven by a desire to help veterinary students transition from school to practice. When I graduated, I went from the academic “ivory tower” to a rural small animal general practice. It was an area where specialists were scarce, clients were blue-collar, and we often faced financial constraints in practice. I had to adapt, and I eventually came to realize that many graduates are in the same boat. New graduates—or even those changing their area of practice—often need help adjusting from a clini-

Spectrum of Care Definitions

One of the most widely accepted definitions of spectrum of care comes from a 2021 paper by Fingland et al.: “Spectrum of care aims to address the growing problem of affordability of veterinary care by providing a continuum of acceptable care that considers available evidence-based medicine while remaining responsive to client expectations and financial limitations, thereby successfully serving an economically diverse clientele.”²

Although it's a good definition, it focuses primarily on financial limitations and does not address other barriers that affect access to care.

I prefer to describe spectrum of care as a continuum of care in which we work collaboratively with clients. In doing so, we select appropriate treatment options that prioritize the patient's quality of life within the client's limitations (financial, emotional, and so on). This approach ensures that we fulfill our legal, moral, and ethical obligations as veterinarians. In fact, the recently updated AVMA Principles of Veterinary Medical Ethics now includes a duty to offer contextual care, which is another term for spectrum of care.³

“ A major benefit of spectrum of care is that it helps alleviate some causes of moral distress and burnout we experience as veterinary professionals.

cal environment where they learned and practiced the highest levels of care to a more pragmatic and flexible approach.

Initially, I thought spectrum of care was exclusively focused on the financial limitations of clients, but I soon realized there are other barriers we must recognize and overcome. Yes, spectrum of care is related to cost of care, but it also encompasses:

- The emotional and physical capacities of clients to care for their pets
- The time clients have available to provide that care
- The pet's ability to cooperate with that care

We must take all of these factors (and more) into account when customizing a treatment path clients will comply with. Ultimately, if we're successful in doing so, our patients will benefit when they receive the care we recommend.

Mental Health Benefits for Veterinary Teams

A major benefit of spectrum of care is that it helps alleviate some causes of moral distress and burnout we experience as veterinary professionals. Put simply, it's good for the team as well as the patient and client.

When we take a spectrum of care approach, we show we're willing to work with clients to best meet their needs, which can help ease the tension that can occur when they push back on cost or other aspects of care. When we communicate in a way that invites clients to share their individual limitations and discuss flexible solutions, we demonstrate that patient care is our priority. Being able to provide some level of care to our patients improves client satisfaction and trust. This in turn boosts team member morale and contributes to a positive clinical experience.

In addition, implementing this kind of approach can reduce instances of economic euthanasia, which are particularly distressing for veterinary teams and have been associated with higher levels of burnout.⁴ By offering flexible care options (in lieu of an “all or nothing” approach that may lead to treatment recommendations beyond a client's financial means), we can mitigate the emotional burden on our team members and enhance their overall well-being.

Practical Steps for Implementing Spectrum of Care

For practices looking to formally embrace a spectrum of care approach, the first step is to get curious. Engage in dialogue with clients to understand their relationship with their pet and identify their limitations. Ask open-ended questions such as, “What is your goal for your pet’s care today?” or “What is your budget today?” Don’t forget to watch for body language clues; a furrowed brow, folded arms, or avoidance of eye contact may signal that a barrier has arisen and needs to be addressed.

It is important to identify these limitations before a course of treatment is selected. For example, if you’re upfront about costs and you understand your client’s financial situation before you obtain radiographs and perform blood work, you’re less likely to find out that all the client’s available funds have been spent on diagnostics, leaving no resources for treatment.

Be sure to involve the entire veterinary team in embracing spectrum of care. This means ensuring that everyone—from veterinary technicians to client service representatives—understands the client’s situation and the rationale behind the chosen treatment plan. This collective understanding can help everyone to avoid passing judgment and can foster a more cohesive and supportive environment for both the team and the client. Although it may not be feasible during a busy clinic day to discuss client context for every treatment plan, veterinarians can encourage team members to ask questions and share their feelings and concerns. Consider holding a team debrief at the end of the day to discuss particularly challenging cases.

It is vital that we work to understand and accept clients’ limitations with empathy and nonjudgment. This is crucial

for maintaining a positive client–veterinarian relationship. We may often pass judgment through nonverbal communication, so we must also be mindful of our body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice.

We can build empathy through continuous awareness and practice, which will ultimately lead to better client interactions and patient outcomes.

Financial Options & Payment Flexibility

Despite an appreciation for the many barriers to care that an individual client may face, numerous studies have found that finances are the most common barrier to care.⁵⁻⁷ Improving access to care requires that we not only present treatment options but also accept a spectrum of payment methods, such as the CareCredit health and pet care credit card.

The CareCredit credit card can help clients manage costs, with flexible financing that lets them make monthly payments that fit their budget. Pet insurance is another valuable resource, particularly for preventive care; however, it needs to be in place prior to emergencies. Even with insurance, there may be significant out-of-pocket expenses. For clients who prefer to spread out their payments, CareCredit could be a viable solution. By accepting a variety of payment methods, we can help ensure that financial barriers do not prevent pets from receiving essential care.

Conclusion

It’s time for the profession to collectively embrace the full practice of spectrum of care for the benefit of teams, patients, and clients. By fostering a collaborative and empathetic environment, we can provide high-quality care that meets the needs and limitations of our clients while upholding our professional responsibilities and doing what we all love best—helping pets get the care they need.

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A CARECREDIT PUBLICATION IN
PARTNERSHIP WITH CLINICIAN'S BRIEF

Fixing the Disconnect in Spectrum of Care

A new specialty care study shows how veterinary teams can work hand in hand for a more seamless referral experience.



No pet owner wants to hear their beloved dog or cat needs care outside the scope of what their regular veterinarian can provide. However, an unexpected trip to the veterinarian is the reality for 4 out of 5 pets,¹ which means visiting an emergency or specialty clinic is highly likely during their lifetime.

When pets are referred for specialty care or taken to an emergency clinic, their owners should feel supported, educated, and reassured while the veterinary professionals caring for their pet communicate effectively with them and with each other in a true “connected care” experience.

Recently, Synchrony conducted a study focused on specialty practitioners and pet owners to understand the interactions involved in veterinary referral experiences and to uncover solutions that help empower healthy referral relationships.²

It revealed several common disconnects in the referral process, highlighting opportunities to create a more seamless and supportive experience and build trust in specialty care.

This article will explore these findings and touch on how emergency and specialty care providers fit into the spectrum of care over a pet’s lifetime. As noted throughout this issue, a spectrum of care approach involves collaborating with clients to devise treatment plans within their limitations—whether financial, emotional, physical, time-related, or patient-centric—that provide acceptable care for the pet, even if it is not the most advanced care available. Both primary care veterinarians and specialists can help pet owners make informed, confident decisions within these boundaries.

Cost Is the #1 Concern

Just as financial barriers are the focus of many spectrum of care conversations, the biggest concern pet owners face with specialty care is cost. In fact, the Synchrony research found that 80% of pet owners are concerned about how much treatment might cost at a specialty/emergency care clinic (**Figure 1**).²

Surprisingly, the study also found that their concern regarding cost matched their concern over their pet's outcome (Figure 2).² This shows just how much paying for care impacts pet owners when they bring their pets in for specialty service.

The Information Gap Is Real

In the Synchrony study, >50% of pet owners admitted that they do not know much, or anything, about specialty care (Figure 3).² This lack of understanding extends to cost as well, with specialists reporting that only 25% of pet owners have a realistic expectation of potential costs before their first visit.² Unfortunately, this can lead to shock and frustration when the treatment estimate or invoice is presented.

Bridging this information gap is crucial to ensuring pet owners are not caught off-guard by the financial demands of specialty care. Specialists and primary care veterinarians can work together to ensure that clients understand the value of advanced diagnostic tests and treatment options, tailoring a plan within the client's means and preventing unwelcome surprises when it is time to pay. Plus, once initial diagnostics and treatments are completed, specialists should encourage clients to return to their primary veterinarians for ongoing care. This supports a strong, connected care relationship.

What Can Primary & Specialty Care Teams Do to Help?

Primary care veterinarians play an important role in preparing pet owners for specialty care; in the Synchrony study, 85% of pet owners felt they had a better understanding of what to expect from a specialist after talking to their primary veterinarian.²

Although it's understandable that primary care teams would be reluctant to share exact referral costs, they can still help set appropriate expectations for pet owners based on what local specialty hospitals have shared with them (see *Talking Points to Help Pet Owners with the Referral Process*, page 9). According to Amanda L. Donnelly, DVM, MBA, an expert on primary and specialty care relationships, this might include the cost of a consultation with a specialist or an ER office call, whether a patient will be seen first by a resident or specialist, what financial options are available, and that there may be a wait before the pet can be seen.³

Top 5 Visit Concerns

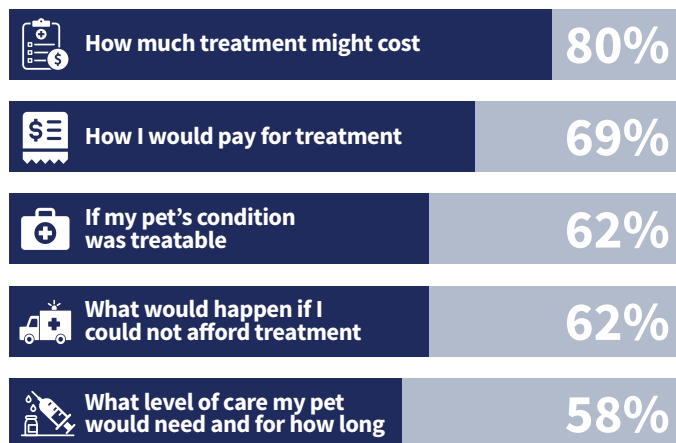


Figure 1 The top 5 visit concerns cited by the pet owners included in the Synchrony study²

How Concerned Are Pet Owners About Cost?

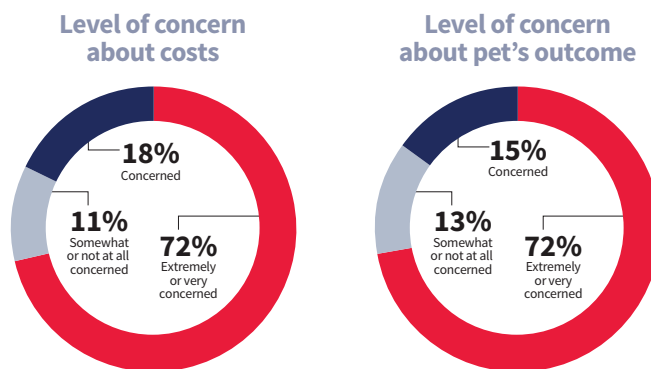


Figure 2 The Synchrony study also revealed that the majority of pet owners are just as concerned about the cost of their pet's care as they are about their pet's health.²

Pet Owner Familiarity with Specialty Care

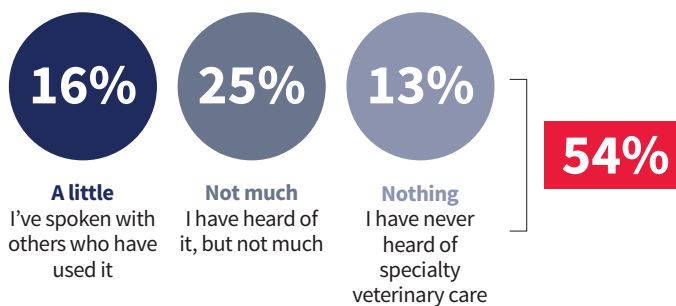


Figure 3 54% of pet owners in the Synchrony study knew little or nothing about specialty care.²

One of the most important things primary care teams can do is emphasize the value of the specialist's expertise, Dr. Donnelly says—the specialist's insights, definitive diagnosis, and detailed treatment plan can help the client understand precisely what's going on with their pet, which can lead to peace of mind and a clear path forward.³

For their part, specialty and emergency clinics can also help pet owners be prepared for the cost of care. Knowing that more than half of clients seek information about payment requirements and options before the visit (**Figure 4**), clinics should consider posting their financial policies and payment options on their website for prospective clients to find as they search for this information.

The Solution? Communicate, Communicate, Communicate

Any care that is “out of the ordinary” can be stressful for pets and their owners; as this new Synchrony study shows, there are opportunities to optimize communication among pet owners and general and specialty veterinarians.² All veterinarians can help alleviate this anxiety by communicating proactively about treatment recommendations, costs, and payment options. Together, we can help close the gaps in connected care and guide clients to the best treatment options for their pets within their circumstances. That's what the full spectrum of care is all about.

Percentage of Pet Owners Who Want Information Before the Appointment

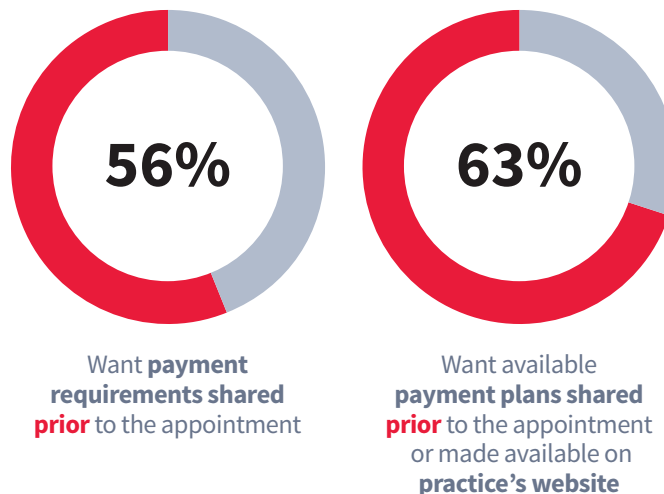


Figure 4 The Synchrony study revealed pet owners want information before the appointment, with 56% citing they want payment requirements shared prior to the appointment, and 63% wanting available payment plans shared prior to the appointment or made available on the practice's website.²

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“One of the most important things primary care teams can do is emphasize the value of the specialist's expertise.

—Amanda L. Donnelly, DVM, MBA

The Synchrony Veterinary Specialty Care Study

To read the full study conducted by Synchrony, visit vetspecialtycare.com

Talking Points to Help Pet Owners with the Referral Process

Amanda L. Donnelly, DVM, MBA

In connected care, the primary veterinarian and specialist work together to bring the full range of treatment options to each pet and pet owner. The following tips can help build a strong connected care relationship and enhance trust and communication.

Refer the Patient, Not the Procedure

The true value of referral lies in the specialist's expertise and experience, not just the treatment they recommend. Primary care veterinarians can reinforce this perspective by referring the patient, not the procedure. For example:

- **Don't say:** "I'm sending Rusty for a cruciate surgery."
- **Do say:** "I'm referring Rusty to an orthopedic surgeon. Once she's examined him and made her recommendation, we can work together to determine what course of action is best."

This approach can help build trust and set expectations for the next step in the process.

Emphasize Benefits & Outcomes

Although treatment details are important, focus on how specialty care will improve the pet's life:

- **Primary care veterinarian:** "By referring Bailey to this specialty clinic for an orthopedic consultation, we'll both enjoy the confidence of a definitive diagnosis and best treatment options."
- **Specialist:** "Our goal with this surgery is to increase her mobility and reduce her pain, thereby improving Bailey's quality of life—and yours."

Reinforce the Connections in Connected Care

Specialists and referring veterinarians who emphasize their partnership with each other can help bring peace of mind to pet owners. For example:

- **Specialist:** "I'm so happy Dr. Johnson referred Molly to me. I recommend an endoscopy to see what's causing the vomiting. Rest assured, we'll keep you and Dr. Johnson updated while Molly's in our care."

Navigate Cost Conversations

Talk about payment options early in the process, including client financing:

- "Just like us, Dr. Cline's practice accepts the CareCredit health and pet care credit card to help you fit Max's specialty care into your budget."
- "We understand making decisions about Max's treatment can be stressful. We can talk about a few options and work with you to find what's best for your budget."

Following these tips and best practices can help alleviate client concerns about specialty care and help them make healthcare decisions that are right for them.

Where is the disconnect in connected care?

When pet parents find themselves in a veterinary ER or specialty clinic, it's important they feel as informed and prepared as possible for what is often a stressful situation.

Synchrony's new Veterinary Specialty Care Study shows a significant gap when it comes to knowledge and communication about what specialty care is, what pet owners can expect and how much it will cost.

Connected care defined

Connected care refers to the relationship between primary care veterinarians, ER/specialty hospitals, and pets and their owners. It's the reality that a lifetime of care for pets requires seamless communication and cooperation between all parties involved.



72%
are equally
concerned about
cost and their
pet's outcome.



Key insights about the pet owner at the center of care

Whether you're the primary care practice or the specialty hospital, understanding the client is the first step to start connecting the dots and closing the gaps.

Cost is pet owners' No. 1 worry when they are considering specialty care.

80%

are concerned about how much treatment might cost.

Stress starts at a relatively low price point.

50%

would be stressed by a bill \$999 or under.

They are unprepared for the specialty care price tag.

Only

25%

of specialty providers say pet owners have a realistic expectation of cost.

Pet owners don't really understand specialty veterinary medicine.

54%

have little to no knowledge of specialty veterinary care.

Dig deeper into the data

While the numbers above show some serious stress factors when it comes to specialty and ER care, they only scratch the surface of what this study reveals. Scan the code or visit vetspecialtycare.com to dig into the full study and see how enhancing collaboration, communication and connection among primary veterinarians, specialists and pet owners can help ensure a Lifetime of Care for pets.



Scan to
read the
study





The Spectrum of Solutions for Veterinary Cost Concerns

Peter Weinstein, DVM, MBA
Simple Solutions for Vets
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When I was in clinical practice, there were a couple of things that scared me. One was an obese dog spay, and the other was talking to clients about expensive estimates. Although concerns about the cost of care are nothing new, the financial challenges pet owners face today are unique.

Over the past few years, as costs for providing veterinary services have risen, so has the cost of accessing veterinary care—faster than the rate of US inflation, in fact.¹ Practice managers report that clients are negotiating treatment estimates like never before, and shelters are filling up while our patient numbers are dropping.^{2,3} With an expense of \$250 being enough to trigger anxiety in 1 out of 4 pet owners,⁴ there's no question our clients are feeling the stress.

The cost of care is one of the most significant barriers our clients face, so it's more important than ever to engage them in upfront, transparent financial discussions. This means creating a client-centric financial system for the practice and training everyone on the team to put it to work. It also means offering a

spectrum of care that encompasses a variety of treatment possibilities and payment options, empowering pet owners to choose the best possible care within their financial means. Here's how to make it happen.

Be Proactive by Creating a Practice Financial Policy

No one likes surprises, especially when it comes to money. A clear, fully implemented, clinic-wide financial policy is essentially a client's bill of rights that establishes the financial relationship you want to build with them. It's more than a transactional document; it's the foundation of how you'll partner with them financially in a transparent and collaborative way. For example, you could promise to:

- Provide the client with a plan for their pet's healthcare before any care is provided.
- Provide a detailed list of costs with the healthcare plan.
- Talk about the patient's needs.
- Listen to the client's needs.
- Discuss various treatment options that provide care for the pet at a price the client can afford.
- Answer any questions about the care to be provided.
- Offer multiple payment options to help ensure that cost is not a barrier to the provision of care.
- Update the client on the progress of their pet as the care is provided.
- Update the client on any changes to the cost of care before they occur.
- Identify specific team members for clients to talk to if there is a problem.

Once a financial policy has been created, make sure it's accessible to clients—post it on your website, include it in your welcome-to-the-practice form, and post it visibly within the clinic. It's also important to train the team on the policy; one of the best ways to do this is role-playing. Role-play the client, client service representative, veterinarian, and technician to cover each element of the financial policy. This can help equip your team with the

skills to talk about cost clearly and effectively, helping prevent invoice surprises.

Be Transparent with Treatment Estimates

The treatment estimate, or healthcare plan, is the tool we use to communicate with clients about cost. When this written document is presented to clients, we focus first on the patient's clinical needs, explaining the benefits to the client and making sure they understand the "why" behind our recommendations. Then we move on to the cost of care.

For a spectrum of care approach, different tiers of care should be presented in the estimate. This could include optimal care options as well as effective alternatives that can benefit that pet but at a lower cost. Whether you call them gold-silver-bronze, Rolls Royce-Lexus-Toyota, or something else, presenting multiple options allows clients to choose the level of care that fits their financial situation without compromising their pet's health.

Avoid Prejudging Clients

Many of us, myself included, have looked at a client's car or outfit and made a judgment about whether they could pay. Many of us have also been shocked by what those same people have agreed to or turned down. If we really want clients to believe in us, we have to communicate about cost up front and without judgment, especially in a business in which we're providing healthcare to 4-legged family members. Failing to proactively and transparently communicate costs and the value of our recommendations to pet owners may lead to suspicion, mistrust, and the declining of treatment plans.

Be Flexible with Multiple Options for Payment

One of the best ways to help clients be prepared for the cost of their pet's healthcare needs is to offer flexible, budget-friendly ways for them to pay for it. The CareCredit health and pet care credit card is a financing

“ Many of us, myself included, have looked at a client's car or outfit and made a judgment about whether they could pay. Many of us have also been shocked by what those same people have agreed to or turned down.

solution that allows pet owners to pay for their pet's care up front and make payments over time.

Make sure clients know their options by sharing the payment methods your practice accepts. Post this information on your website and include it in appointment reminders, client newsletters, and other communication touchpoints. Be sure to ask new clients if they have pet insurance and, if so, what company and type of policy; if they say no, ask them if they want more information. Be ready with your recommendations for insurance providers you trust, but make sure they understand it won't cover pre-existing conditions. It's a great conversation to have with new clients and clients with new pets.

When we offer multiple options for payment, we're practicing spectrum of care. Working within our clients' limitations and providing financial solutions can allow them to choose treatment over euthanasia. Even clients with limited financial means can often afford some form of treatment to help their pet—and they desperately want to. So let's help them find a treatment path they can manage.

Build Trust Through Communication

As veterinarians, we are doctors and healthcare professionals—but we are also service providers. Our role extends beyond just caring for animals to also being educators and

helping clients understand the value of veterinary care. And the foundation of this understanding is trust.

Although 7 out of 10 pet owners consider their pet a part of their family, many are unprepared for the cost of pet ownership.⁴ So when a service estimate is higher than they're expecting, they have to weigh the value of their pet's veterinary expenses against other costs in their lives. To help clients recognize the value of care, we need to clearly communicate the importance of a medical service and how it will positively impact the well-being of the patient and share the cost transparently, whether it's the highest level of care or an acceptable alternative. Make sure you and your team are actively listening, clearly communicating, and working with pet owners to find a solution that works for them and their pet.

Conclusion

Our job as veterinarians is to maintain the human-animal bond and make sure clients understand the value of the care they receive at our practice and how it helps protect that bond. When we elevate the client's experience through being proactive, transparent, flexible, and trustworthy, we make it easier for them to say yes to care. After all, veterinary medicine is not a transactional profession but a relationship profession. And when we help patients get the medical care they need, we strengthen our relationship with their owners.

“ When we elevate the client's experience through being proactive, transparent, flexible, and trustworthy, we make it easier for them to say yes to care.

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Hospitality Runs the Spectrum

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Having spent almost 40 years in veterinary medicine and a lifetime immersed in client service, I believe hospitality can revolutionize the way we provide care. That may sound like a bold claim, but I've seen it happen in numerous practices I've consulted with and managed.

Hospitality is a mindset that puts the client at the center of care, caters to the individual needs of each client and pet being served, and supports the growth and well-being of the veterinary team. Intentionally using hospitality skills

throughout the client experience can lead to greater satisfaction in our work as healthcare providers while building trust and transparent communication with clients.

As spectrum of care is beginning to take hold of the profession's interest and imagination, hospitality is even more relevant. With a hospitality-driven approach, practicing spectrum of care places the client and pet at the center of the care plan and makes each interaction and recommendation a personalized one. When veterinary teams merge these philosophies, we create a more positive environment for our clients, patients, and ourselves. Let's explore how hospitality can be symbiotic with spectrum of care and help deliver an exceptional veterinary experience for all involved.

Personalizing Service

In a hospitality-driven practice, the veterinary team focuses on providing services based on individual client needs. In the same way, a spectrum of care approach involves customizing treatment plans according to the financial, emotional, and physical capacities of both clients and pets. By asking questions and seeking to understand each client's unique situation and goals, we can tailor care plans to ensure they are both effective and compassionate. This personalized approach not only builds stronger relationships with our clients but also increases access to care for our patients.

Building Trust Through Communication

Communication is the cornerstone of our relationship with clients, and active listening is the key to effective communication. Verbalizing your interpretation of what the client has shared with you is part of active listening and can help prevent incorrect assumptions from being



“By identifying challenges and bringing them into the open, veterinary teams can offer practical, personalized care with compassion.”

made while also signaling that you care and are striving to help. A few simple actions you can take: Use the client's name, observe and react to their body language, and reference personal details in the conversation.

Acknowledge any limitations and preferences the client shares as you present options for a realistic and achievable care plan. When clients feel heard and understood, they are more likely to trust our recommendations and comply with treatment.

Practicing a Team-Based Approach

Everyone on the care team—client service representatives, technicians, veterinary assistants, and veterinarians—needs to be focused on anticipating and observing the client's needs and wants. Asking open-ended questions can help uncover financial constraints or other limitations such as limited time or ability for them to carry out home care instructions. Observe client body language for confusion or hesitation and revisit your talking points if discomfort is evident. By identifying challenges and bringing them into the open, veterinary teams can offer practical, personalized care with compassion. This observe-and-anticipate skill is embedded in hospitality and assures clients that we are their partner in their pet's lifelong care.

Understanding the Real Hero of the Story

True hospitality shows we recognize who the main character of the story is. In his book *Building a StoryBrand: Clarify Your Message So Customers Will Listen*, Donald Miller explains that, in any successful narrative, there is always a hero, a challenge, and a counselor who serves as a guide to a successful outcome.¹ In veterinary medicine, the client is the hero, and we as service providers are the counselors guiding them. In spectrum of care, we guide the hero by providing various treatment options that meet them where they are and help them make the decision that is best for their pets and circumstances. Involving them in shared decision-making and respecting their financial and emotional boundaries can lead to more satisfactory and sustainable care solutions.

Practicing Empathy

If a pet is sick or injured, a visit to the veterinary clinic may be the most stressful part of the client's day. Use empathy to acknowledge this distress by saying something like, “I know this is frightening and I'm going to help.” Simply acknowledging your client's concerns can make a lasting impact. Offering a spectrum of care shows

empathy for the client as well. It balances these stressful aspects of coming to the veterinary clinic—the distress of facing a pet health issue and the frustration of encountering barriers to care—by providing a plan to manage both.

Addressing Cost of Care

Bringing a hospitality mindset to your financial relationship with clients goes hand in hand with spectrum of care. Just as you recommend a range of care options that are effective for the pet's health, proactively communicate a spectrum of financial choices that can work for the client's financial situation.

When sharing payment solutions, include options like flexible financing with the CareCredit health and pet care credit card, pet insurance, and wellness plans. This communicates you care about their financial well-being as much as you do their pet's well-being. In other words, it shows hospitality.

Bringing It All Together

Hospitality and spectrum of care go hand in hand. The potential upside for your practice is huge: less conflict with clients, team members who can't wait to come to work on Monday, a steady stream of referrals, and loyal clients who stay with you for years. Plus, they help us care for pets effectively, thereby improving our clients' lives. Whether you are a veterinarian, practice manager, technician, or client service representative, this integrated philosophy can help you anticipate and personalize each person's experience for their gain—and yours!

Reference

1. Miller D. *Building a StoryBrand: Clarify Your Message So Customers Will Listen*. HarperCollins Leadership; 2017.

This article was adapted with permission from Debbie Boone's book *Hospitality in Healthcare* (Chandler, AZ: Press 49, 2023).

Additional Resources

To learn more about spectrum of care and the CareCredit health and pet care credit card, check out the additional resources below:

- The CareCredit health and pet care credit card: carecredit.com
- Veterinary Specialty Care: A Synchrony Lifetime of Care Study: vetspecialtycare.com
- Pet Lifetime of Care Study: petlifetimeofcare.com
- Veterinary resources and insights: carecredit.com/vetinsights

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