Client Communication

Debbie Boone, CCS, CVPM
2 Manage Vets Consulting
Gibsonville, North Carolina

Clients whose pet has a TBI are often extremely upset, and the entire team is responsible for helping soothe and support them. Team members should be able to read client body language and react appropriately. Some clients will be more emotional and want physical contact, whereas others will be more controlled and just want verbal reassurance.

A steady, panic-free veterinary team can provide the most comfort to the client. Feeling that competent, well-prepared team members are caring for his or her pet is encouraging and stress-reducing. Here are some tips for communicating with clients:

- When explaining the patient’s care and treatment, all team members should avoid medical language that may be confusing to the client. Describe the situation so that the client can relate. For example, make drawings that show brain swelling or use a pain scale to help with understanding the degree of pain.
- Front-desk team members are likely first to support and calm clients. Show empathy for their distress.
- Veterinary technicians should also show empathy when discussing the treatment process. Let the client know that a test will take 10 minutes rather than leaving him or her in an examination room with no idea what is taking place. Show compassion and collaboration by sitting beside the client instead of standing across the examination table during discussions. Take care to show the value and necessity of suggested services.
- Despite the situation’s urgency, the veterinary technician should always take a history. Ask open-ended questions that require the client to tell a story about what happened. Note the difference between What questions do you have, which opens the dialogue, and Do you have any questions, which likely closes the conversation with No.
- If the patient is hospitalized, continue to communicate with the client about any changes in the treatment plan with updates on the patient’s progress and treatment costs.
- If the prognosis warrants euthanasia, concern for the client is paramount. Every team member should show compassion and understanding. Make a quiet place available for the client to say Goodbye. If necessary, have a team member stay with the client until he or she gains composure, especially if the client is too distraught to drive. Handle the remains with respect.

Editor’s note: Dr. Pamela K. Fettig has had an extensive career as a veterinarian, with a focus in anesthesia. Her interests include traumatic brain injury, acute kidney injury, sepsis, polytrauma, and electrolyte abnormalities.

Debbie Boone is a practice consultant with more than 30 years of experience—23 as hospital administrator and COO of both small and mixed animal practices. She is a certified veterinary practice manager with a certification in customer service. Her focus is on coaching exceptional communication, client service, and team culture.

References