



Consultation Skills for Veterinary Nurses Mini Series

**Session 1: Improve Your Consult Skills
and Improve the Outlook both for Your
Patients and Your Business**

Alison Lambert BVSc MMRS MRCVS



This webinar is the first of a series of three concerning the customer experience in the consult room:

1. Delivering a better consult room customer experience
2. The seven steps to excellent customer care in the consult room
3. Measuring and managing customer care in the consult room

1. Delivering a better consult room customer experience

Veterinary business model

Regardless of the type and size of practice, the same veterinary business model applies. Each business must follow a series of five steps in order for the practice to grow:

1. Make the phone ring
2. Convert the caller into a paying client
3. Convert the consultation into further treatment and care
4. Charge correctly and fairly for all work done
5. Get recommended (which in turn makes the phone ring...)

It's important to acknowledge that the customer experience really matters to your business, at every point of interaction - owners assume high levels of clinical competence at every practice, but how you treat *them* really counts, and sets you apart from your competitors.

This is crucial because:

- In the last fourteen years, the number of veterinary sites in the UK has more than doubled - potential clients have much more choice.
- Owners are much more informed, thanks to the internet. The average customer consults an average of 10.4 sources before making a choice or a decision

Who is your customer?

Understanding who your typical customer is helps you tailor your service accordingly:

- A third of UK pet owners are aged 25-34 years
- A quarter of owners use more than one practice
- Recommendation is the main way in which owners choose a vet
- Three quarters of owners live within five miles of their practice
- Owners are not with you for life - they may move house or lose their animal, but they are also equally likely to follow a favourite vet who moves to another practice, try out a new practice in the town or switch practices on the recommendation of their friends and family
- Cost is relatively unimportant - fewer than 10% of owners make their decisions primarily on price
- Owners look online and ask advice from friends, family or other animal care professionals (groomers, farriers, pet shops, feed merchants, rescue centres etc.)
- Owners make choices based on value for money - when your service is excellent it justifies the cost

So owners are making choices that are informed by their emotions - assessing how a practice 'feels' - just as you do when you choose one referral centre over another.

Your clinical competence is assumed.

Customer care is more likely to win or lose you clients than your clinical care.

Providing a valuable consult room experience

Your clients are paying for your time, advice and expertise. They can buy products and find information online, but they can't get personal care, tailored to the needs of their animals on the internet.

That's what you offer, but *how* you do it is your real point of difference:

- Make clear recommendations
- Fix your prices and display them clearly to avoid nasty surprises
- Charge accurately for work done
- Do the right thing for the practice - great medicine is our priority, and when delivered with warmth and clarity it is also great business

Communication is key

The evidence from studies in the field of human medicine is very clear - open and empathic communication has a positive impact on clinical outcomes.

In the veterinary field it has also been shown to significantly improve owner compliance.

For many of us, communication excellence does not come naturally - the average Emotional Intelligence rating for non-veterinary professionals is 71%, for vets it is 59%. The good news is that it can be learned and measured. But we have some work to do!

Mehrabian's well-respected model identified that when we are communicating our attitudes, the message is conveyed by a number of routes:

- Just 7% of the message is communicated via the actual words spoken
- 38% is determined by the tone of voice
- A massive 55% comes from body language and facial expression

This means that in the consult room, what you are seen to do matters more than what you say.

In the next webinar we will learn the seven steps for effective client communication in the consult room. These have been adapted from the Calgary-Cambridge model used in human medicine:

1. Prepare yourself
2. Create rapport
3. Use open questions
4. Undertake a visible pet / horse examination
5. Make recommendations
6. Check understanding and signpost next steps
7. Au revoir, not goodbye!