

How Does Your Cat's Vet Talk to You?

Study shows vets communicate with owners differently in problem, wellness appointments.

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A study found that the tone of a vet's voice during a visit can have an effect on their patients' owners. Veterinarians communicate with cat owners differently in problem appointments — those in which vets are discussing health threats — versus wellness appointments, according to a new communication study by the Argus Institute at Colorado State University.

In wellness visits, veterinarians tend to focus on building a relationship with the cat parent and cat, the study revealed. This includes engaging the owner as an active partner in caring for the health of their cat.

The study showed that veterinarians also communicate with a different tone, including more social talk, laughter, reassurance and compliments.

In problem appointments, however, veterinarians focus predominantly on medical topics. The tone can reflect stress as some veterinarians are perceived as hurried and some owners as anxious and emotionally distressed, according to the study.

Conductors of the study say that this reaction to problem appointments could be detrimental.

“Without engaging the client in a conversation about their pet and obtaining their opinion, they aren't as likely to follow through on home care,” said Jane Shaw, D.V.M., Ph.D., director of the Argus Institute. “They also are not as likely to build a strong relationship — and subsequent loyalty — to their veterinarian.”

“Society is changing, animals are regarded as family members, and clients expect a different level of service from the veterinarians. People want to interact with their veterinarians and be a part of their pet's veterinary care,” she added.