

Fewer Clinic Visits Can Risk Cats Health

Animal health organizations team up for educational campaign.

The American Association of Feline Practitioners (AAFP) and Fort Dodge Animal Health have teamed up for an educational campaign focused on helping cat owners watch for the subtle signs of sickness and recognize the importance of twice-a-year wellness exams.

The program includes a clinic education kit designed to help veterinarians communicate with pet owners about cat health and behavior issues. The kit includes tips and information on transporting a cat to the clinic and how to make the visit go smoothly.

The campaign, called Healthy Cats for Life, also includes an official website, www.catwellness.org.

We feel this campaign addresses issues faced by cats and their owners, such as getting the cat to the clinic, misunderstanding feline behavior and the fact that cats are masters at hiding illness, said James R. Richards, DVM, Director of the Cornell Feline Health Center, Cornell University College.

According to a report compiled by Bardsley Neidhart Research, 33 million cats do not receive regular veterinary care, compared to seven million dogs. Also, cats visit the veterinarian half as often as dogs, even though they outnumber them by 20 percent. This means many feline illnesses and diseases may go undetected until it's too late.

One reason for fewer veterinary visits may be the difficulty of transporting a cat to the clinic. According to the BNRResearch report, 30 percent of owners find it difficult to catch the cat, place it in a carrier and bring it to the veterinarian.

Some owners may believe the myth that cats are supposedly able to take care of themselves without much human intervention. Some owners only seek professional advice when they notice a serious illness, according to the BNRResearch report.

However, you can watch for changes in behavior. According to the Feline Behavior Guidelines report from the AAFP, changes in behavior may actually be subtle signs of sickness.

Another possible reason for fewer veterinary visits is the misunderstanding of cats behavior. The AAFP report says research shows negative behaviors anything from destroying furniture to urinating outside the litterbox are the most common reasons cats are euthanized. These behaviors may be normal behaviors that a veterinarian can address, or they may be signs of sickness.

For more information on the campaign, visit www.catwellness.org.

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