

How Does Your Dog's Vet Talk to You?

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

Posted: September 18, 2009, 5 a.m. EDT

Veterinarians communicate with dog owners differently in problem appointments — those in which vets are discussing pet 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 pet owner and pet, the study revealed. This includes engaging the owner as an active partner in caring for the health of their pet so the pet owner participates in the visit and has an opportunity to voice his or her opinion.

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.