Part 2

How To Practice With Cats In Mind

Q&A with Dr. Ashlie Saffire, past president of the FelineVMA

Cat ownership is on the rise, presenting a tremendous opportunity for practices, cat caregivers and most important, cats. Fountain Report recently asked Ashlie Saffire, DVM, DABVP (Feline), immediate past president of the FelineVMA, to speak about that opportunity and why practices should embrace it. Dr. Saffire is owner and lead veterinarian at Faithful Friends Veterinary Clinic and Cat Specialty Center in Dublin, Ohio, a Gold Level Cat Friendly Practice®. This is Part 2 of a two-part interview.

Fountain Report: What challenges might the practice owner face in terms of enlisting the support of staff to create a Cat Friendly environment at a practice? How can he/she meet those challenges?

Dr. Saffire: One of the biggest challenges we see in veterinary medicine -- not just in feline practice -- is resistance to changing the way we've always done things. A few team members may be incredibly passionate about improving feline care, but if the entire team isn't committed to that goal, it's going to be very difficult to create meaningful, lasting change.

Change can be uncomfortable. Sometimes people are hesitant because they don't understand why a change is necessary. Other times, they're worried that a new approach will make their job more difficult or take more time. This is why education is so important. We can't simply tell people to change how they work without giving them the knowledge, tools and confidence to succeed. The FelineVMA's Cat Friendly Certificate Program is a RACE-approved program that helps veterinary professionals develop a deeper understanding of feline behavior, handling, environmental needs, caregiver communication and the unique considerations involved in providing excellent feline healthcare.

I encourage practices to make Cat Friendly education a standard part of onboarding and ongoing professional development. Establish a clear expectation that this is how your practice has chosen to care for cats. Leadership also has to be willing to establish and uphold a consistent standard of care.

FR: What are the risks – if any – of a mixed-practice owner taking steps toward cat-friendliness? How can they be avoided?

Dr. Saffire: I love this question, because when I think about the risks of becoming a Cat Friendly Practice®, the first thing that comes to mind is that you better prepare yourself for a whole lot more cats! I say that somewhat jokingly, but there's a real business opportunity emerging in feline healthcare.

We're seeing changes in the demographics of feline caregivers and their expectations of care. We're also seeing important shifts in who caregivers are. Millennials represent a significant proportion of households with cats, and nearly half of cat caregivers are men. But what I find even more interesting is how cats are increasingly being viewed as members of the family. Cat caregivers are looking for veterinary care that reflects this relationship. When a practice demonstrates that it understands feline behavior, prioritizes feline welfare and provides a truly Cat Friendly experience, that practice is positioning itself for a tremendous opportunity.


Ashlie Saffire

Ultimately, the risk isn't becoming Cat Friendly. It's failing to recognize how much feline healthcare is changing and missing the opportunity to change with it. The beautiful thing is that when we get this right, everyone benefits. Cats receive better care, caregivers have greater confidence in their veterinary team, employees experience more rewarding interactions with feline patients, and practices create opportunities for sustainable growth. To me, that's not much of a risk. That's a pretty exciting future for veterinary medicine.