

Harnessing a feline-friendly ethos: how VNs can help

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Categories : [Practical](#), [RVNs](#)

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Cats. Pesky things, right? Okay, that seems harsh. Yes they are cute, mischievous, funny and make for excellent memes and videos, but that's all outside of practice, isn't it?



Cats can be tricky to work with in practice. However, working towards the CFC standard can help make cat consults easier to deal with.

Within practice, however, there can be hissing, clawing, scrambling and simply awkwardness – all while you are often trying to keep the owner calm, convince them Fluffy is quite safe under your care and maintain your professionalism. See? Pesky.

However, a digital resource out there wants to help and, hopefully, can be of use to veterinary nurses and practices everywhere wanting to improve the cat friendliness of their practice operations, making life easier for cat, owner, VN and vet.

Set up by the International Society of Feline Medicine (ISFM), the veterinary division of International Cat Care (ICC), the Cat Friendly Clinic (CFC) standard – which you use the ICC website to register for, seek guidance from and find requirements to follow – is a self-assessment accreditation scheme open to any veterinary practice that cares for feline patients.

To gain accreditation – which is free and comes in bronze, silver and gold levels – clinics on the scheme have to follow certain requirements regarding design, equipment and facilities within the clinic, as well as following a standard of care for cats.

Once officially a CFC, ICC contacts the practice annually for reaccreditation, confirming these criteria are still being met. Cat owners, meanwhile, can find a CFC-accredited practice by using the ICC website's search tool. Practices must be an ISFM member to be a CFC practice.

Need from profession

According to the ICC, the CFC standard came about following the Cat Friendly Practice campaign and competition it launched in the UK in 2006. Two booklets were produced with the aim of improving the understanding of cats' needs in the clinic, as well as changing various aspects of the clinic to make it more cat friendly.

In the competition, clinics were invited to apply for a Cat Friendly Practice award, with more than 50 given over a two-year period, recognising practices making outstanding efforts to rethink their approach to feline patients.

Andy Sparkes, ICC veterinary director, said important points emerged from the campaign.

“Many practical aspects about making clinics more cat friendly were learned from the participants, and clinics also reported the changes resulted in cats being obviously much more relaxed,” he said. “Encouragingly, owners often noticed a big difference as well.

“Many practices, however, did express a desire for a scheme based on an objective clinic standard, rather than a subjective competition. These findings all prompted the development of the CFC standard.”

The standard was developed with a panel of expert feline vets, in close collaboration with RCVS' Practice Standards Scheme (PSS). It, therefore, includes all elements of the PSS core standard, with a number of elements from the higher levels of RCVS PSS accreditation. It also incorporates numerous elements specific to the needs of cats in the clinic.

“The overall aim of the standard is to help improve quality of care and well-being for cats in veterinary clinics, minimise difficulties and stress associated with veterinary visits and for clinics to be able to demonstrate to clients they think and care for cats differently,” said Dr Sparkes.

What next?

cat friendly clinic

Veterinary Clinics

- > vets/horses: register interest
- > vets/horses: additional materials
- > client leaflets
- > find a cat friendly clinic
- > owners: more about CFC
- > owners: what to expect
- > owners: tell your vet
- > 'Caturday' competition



ISFM Practice Members and Cat Friendly Clinics

The clinics listed on these pages are:

- **ISFM Practice members**

Some of our members have also been awarded:

- **Cat Friendly Clinic** status, at either bronze, silver or gold level.
- In North and South America the Cat Friendly Clinic scheme is being run by the American Association of Feline Practitioners. Please see their website for a list of accredited clinics in the Americas - <http://www.aafpp.com>

Country	County
ENGLAND	-N/A-



Pet owners can use the site's search facilities to find an CFC-accredited practice.

Hollybank Veterinary Centre

584 Chester Road
SANDIWAY
CWS 2DX

t. 01606 880890

e. info@hollybankvets.co.uk



Hook Norton Veterinary Group

White Hills Surgery
Sibford Road
Hook Norton
OX15 5DG

t. 01608 730501

<http://www.hooknortonvets@hotmail.co.uk>



How site users view search results.

So, what appears on the website to help VNs help their practices become an accredited CFC?

“All clinics that register their interest in becoming accredited receive access to many materials, including our veterinary guide to creating a cat friendly clinic,” said Dr Sparkes.

“This is a substantial manual with a wealth of information that helps clinics become more understanding of cats and adapt equipment, premises and attitudes to become more cat friendly and reduce veterinary visit stress.”

Further information and guidance is also available, he said, as clinics have often found barriers – practical or otherwise – to becoming a CFC exist.

“For example, this might be how to structure a waiting room to be more cat friendly, deciding what equipment is needed or how to structure the hospitalisation ward,” he said.

“While some clinics have found excellent and innovative ways to create a much better experience for cats and their owners, others have struggled, so we wanted to explain the reasoning behind some of the CFC criteria, as well as providing practical solutions and examples where clinics have found good solutions.”

However, if proper accreditation isn't important to the practice, the website still offers a plethora of information for both veterinary staff and owners. Registering interest opens access to the manual guiding practices to CFC standard.

“Whether a clinic becomes accredited, the most important thing is to be proactive and engage with ways of making it a better environment for cats and their owners,” Dr Sparkes said.

“The CFC pages on our website are freely accessible to owners, as well as to vets and VNs and, in fact, we encourage owners to look at these materials so they know what they can expect from a CFC. We also provide facilities for owners to give feedback – anonymously if they prefer, either good or bad – about their experience of visiting any accredited CFC.”

Starting to think about the CFC applications in your practice? Veterinary nurses, said Dr Sparkes, have an especially “critical” role in making clinics more cat friendly.

“It is often the nursing staff that drive through changes to make a clinic truly cat friendly and set the benchmark for compassionate and empathetic care for feline patients,” he said.

“The information we provide about CFCs is aimed as much at the VN as it is at the vet. In fact, to become a truly cat friendly clinic, it is important all clinic staff members understand and engage with cats and their owners in a knowledgeable and empathetic way.”

Bountiful benefits

For those practices that have “really engaged” with the CFC ethos, feedback has been “fantastic”, said Dr Sparkes.

“Staff have been able to see a real difference in the level of stress cats experience while in the clinic and, as a result, it has been much easier to handle the cats and perform procedures.

“Equally, in many cases, clients too have noticed the difference and an important part of making a clinic cat friendly is to explain to owners what is being done, why it is being done and how their cats benefit as a result.

“As time goes by, the importance of being cat friendly will only increase.”

On this, when asked where he sees CFC and its accompanying website in five years' time, Dr

Sparkes said the standard's subject is an "evolving issue".

"Cat ownership is increasing in most countries and, as owners become more knowledgeable with access to good information and resources, there will be increasing pressure for veterinary clinics to adapt to this change and develop better cat friendly approaches.

"As time goes by, both the breadth and depth of information we provide will become greater, but I think, inevitably, the criteria for CFC accreditation will change over time, at least in some respects, to reflect this improved knowledge and understanding of cats."

More immediately, the CFC website is updated "on a regular basis", while an overhaul of the site is planned in the later half of this year to make the web-based application to become a CFC much smoother.



Case study: using cat friendly guidelines in practice

Sue Thomas, an RVN at Severn Edge Veterinary Group, discusses how she has used the ICC's cat friendly guidelines and how these have benefitted staff, cats and owners.

"Don't let the cat go and don't let it bite the vet" is how I would sum up the attitude towards handling cats when I was a trainee nurse.

I trained around 15 years ago and, although the situation has improved in many practices since those dark days when cats were treated as small dogs, there's still a way to go.

After attending various CPD events and ICC training days, I was hooked on the idea of being cat friendly and decided to take the practice along with me on the journey. Plus, being an RVN, I saw

an opportunity to incorporate cat friendly handling into the core of nurse training and reap the benefits across the practice.

Our student VNs are now bombarded with cat friendly guidelines, as are the vets. At the time I qualified, there really was nothing like this – no guidelines on handling cats any differently from dogs.

Cats were pinned down and scruffed as a matter of course for any treatment in the practice – we had no idea it was the wrong thing to do at the time as no guidelines suggested we should be doing anything different.

In my experience, time is key to getting the basics right when handling cats – time for a cat to get used to its surroundings and time for VNs and veterinary surgeons to observe and note the cat's behaviour and demeanour before attempting any procedure. When cats become stressed, their behaviour can change and they can become defensive or even defensively aggressive.

The mantra is less is more. Give them time to adjust and get used to things. In this way, we've found there are very few cats we can't do things to.

Be quiet and slow – it can be time-consuming, but the benefits are worth it. Just by taking those initial steps, cats in the practice are more receptive to what you do to them. Procedures, such as taking blood with minimum restraint or, occasionally, with just a towel around the front of the cat, become possible.

Severn Edge now has years of cat friendliness under its belt. I train the student VNs using the ICC's cat handling guidelines, for example.

Actually, on this, I don't think all colleges are teaching cat friendly handling techniques, yet it's so important to reduce stress. Students sometimes have no idea where to start with the techniques, so I get them to look at why a cat might be stressed and how it is behaving.

I've attended loads of lectures and CPD days about handling cats in practice and ways to reduce stress, run mainly by the ICC. You realise cats are generally only aggressive because they are frightened, so once you approach them with that in mind, they become less fearful and their behaviour changes for the better.

The benefits of having everyone in the practice on the same cat friendly page are many. Nurses' lives are made easier by having calmer cats to deal with, vets can carry out procedures without the risk of losing a finger or eye, owners receive the same cat friendly message about cat care no matter who they speak to within the practice, cats will be less stressed and fearful during the visit and happy patients and clients means increased revenue – our accounts book is looking a lot

better, and we have very happy clients.

We notice it when a new client comes in from another practice and he or she sees the difference in how his or her cat behaves because of the cat friendly steps we've taken. Owners definitely talk to each other, too, so we're known as a cat friendly practice in the area.

I must add, being cat friendly doesn't mean you have to spend a lot on equipment. The main expense for us at Severn Edge has been putting feline pheromone spray everywhere – nothing else has cost much.

Cats need warm, comfy bedding, a hiding place – even a cardboard box is fine – and the basics, such as food bowls and litter trays being placed a good distance apart, which doesn't cost anything.

People are always saying they don't have time to do all this stuff to be cat friendly, but a few small changes will make a huge difference and impact your practice revenues. The difference really is amazing – happy cats, vets, VNs and, of course, clients.

For more details, to register your interest in becoming a CFC or to access resources useful in practice, visit www.catfriendlyclinic.org

Know of a digital resource that needs championing? Get in touch with editor Rebecca Hubbard on rebeccahubbard@vbd.co.uk or 01733 383551.