

## **EMERGENCIES: WHAT TO SAY AND DO!**

David Liss, RVT, VTS (ECC)  
Los Angeles, CA, USA

### **Dealing with crisis:**

The first rule to dealing with crisis is to remain calm. Owners will want the veterinary staff to take charge and assist them in dealing with their loved ones' tragic situation. Remember to move them from the front lobby into an exam room, or somewhere where they can process what is happening. Go in and check on them as soon as you have entered the vital information on the pet into the medical record.

### **Steps to dealing with a common emergency:**

#### Telephone:

Remember to always have clear and concise directions for a client. It is not acceptable to not know how to direct a client to the hospital. Remind them to drive calmly and carefully- speeding or erratic driving will make the situation worse. When on the phone, remember to get as much information as you can. Questions like these can help greatly when the animal presents:

- What did he get into?
- How much did he get into?
- When did the symptoms start?
- Has this ever happened before?

Once the client is on the way, remember to pull the patient's chart- if they have been to the hospital before. Highlighting past medical history will be very important for the owner.

When the client arrives follow these steps:

- Come from behind the desk to greet and assist the client if needed
- Communicate with the technician staff- prepare them they might need to assist the patient getting into the hospital
- Once the pet is in the hospital, if it is quite sick it will usually be brought right to the back
- Ask the client to wait in the front while the medical staff starts treatment
- If the client has not been at the hospital before ask them if they would like to start emergency medical treatment
- Get them to start filling out a New Client Info Sheet
- If they are distraught place them in an exam room so they can fill out the sheet in private
- Check on them frequently
- Often clients become distracted and do not finish the sheet- make sure they do and in a timely manner
- Enter the client information in the computer rapidly for the medical staff
- Prepare a chart and bring it to the back
- Try to get an update on the pet from the medical staff
- Report the update to the owner and let them know the medical staff will be with them shortly

### **Common emergencies, presentations, treatment**

- "Blocked cat:" Male cats often develop stones, mucus or crystal plugs in their urethra (tube between bladder and penis) which results in an obstruction to urinary flow. These cats can have a multitude of signs from anorexia, to vomiting, to straining to urinate, to the owner mistaking them for being "constipated." Constipated male cats should be triaged by a technician immediately to be assessed for a blockage. This is a medical emergency and the cat needs to be treated right away. An IV catheter is placed to give fluids. Bloodwork is drawn to check electrolyte levels as urinary obstruction can lead to life-threatening potassium levels. Finally, the cat will need to be

anesthetized to have a urinary catheter placed to relieve the obstruction. Typically the cat remains in the hospital for 2-3 days for observation and the urinary catheter is removed. If the patient can urinate on their own they can be discharged.

- Bloat: For reasons that are not entirely understood dog's stomachs' can rotate and flip. When this occurs gas that is trapped in their stomachs expands and places pressure on the lungs, diaphragm, abdominal organs and even the blood vessels supplying blood to these organs. The lack of blood flow causes the tissue to die. These are typically large breed dogs that present with a history of vomiting or retching. Retching is an important clinical sign because it means the dog cannot vomit fully. These dogs are often bloated and are rushed into the back. This condition can be life-threatening so typically an IV catheter is placed, fluids are administered and bloodwork is run. Sometimes an ECG is run immediately because these patients can suffer life threatening arrhythmias. The dog will typically need an x-ray to confirm the diagnosis, and then emergency surgery is indicated to flip the stomach back to its normal anatomical location. Recovery is usually 2-3 days in the hospital. Once the patient is eating on their own they can be discharged.