

dvm
Commentary

A solution for decreased feline visits

My blueprint for feline client compliance—spur traffic into your hospital one adoption at a time

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Contributing author

There is no question: Practice owners of mature practices (those in existence for seven or more years) are seeing a dramatic decrease in the number of cat visits.

In my own practice, feline transactions make up only about 14 percent of the total. And that is down from 30 percent in years' past.

Of course, most seasoned practitioners knew this would happen once the idea of "over-vaccination" became widespread. Typically in the past, 65 percent to 70 percent of practice income was based on preventive

care procedures. Oftentimes good medical histories and comprehensive physical examinations allowed us to discover internal and external problems that had not caught the eye of the pet owner. Unfortunately, pets are now suffering from many medical conditions not caught early.

Remember that we taught clients that vaccinations were more important than the detailed medical history, physical exam and appropriate screening tests. Even today many practitioners just can't understand why the client is unwilling to spend much larger sums of money just because the pet is now 7!

In my community, we can learn from experience. In fact, recently our local animal shelter director va-

cated the position. Even more unfortunate was the fact that I was the veterinarian on the animal shelter board. The previous director had failed to have any other employee certified to perform euthanasias.

As you might expect, I received a call from the mayor concerned about a shelter that was now overflowing with intakes; and there were more animals outside the door.

There were very few puppies in the facility, and they seemed to be readily adopted. It was a different story with the 1- to 10-year-old dogs mostly related to the pit bull family. I also discovered that approximately 75 percent to 80 percent of the pets being admitted were due to owner relinquishment.

Some people were moving out of the area; others said they could not afford these pets anymore, but the vast majority said they did not want them anymore. And the real reason I'm recounting this story has more to do with my love for cats.

There are so many cats in need of homes. The choices shelters are making are more about how much time you can buy these animals before they are euthanized.

I've been a veterinarian for 40 years but never in my career has anything bothered me like this issue.

There were some animals I just could not euthanize. Kittens were brought into this world, from no fault of their own, just to have someone euthanize them.

To date I have taken more than 40 of these kittens to our practice. In four weeks, many have been adopted, mostly by our own clients.

My wife found a very large parrot cage at an antique store. We refurbished it a little and strategically placed in our reception area. All of the rescued cats are given a bath upon arrival, thoroughly examined and found to be as healthy as we can determine. We treat for ear mites, deworm them, and treat with a one-dose regimen of ponazuril for coccidian.

We provide personalized information about caring for new kittens, vaccinations, nutrition, etc. They receive a free dose of a top flea product. (The company even reimburses us.)

We ask the new pet parent to take the kitten home and follow our directions, emphasizing the feeding

I had adopted more kittens in four weeks than the shelter had all year.

of some canned food for at least the first three to four weeks. We can give away premium food samples and coupons for the pet owner to go purchase high-quality food to get these kittens started right.

An appointment is scheduled for them to return in seven days for evaluation and to begin the initial kitten vaccination series. They are also told to return immediately if any health problems are observed.

To date, we have had one kitten returned from a household where the owner smoked two to three packs of cigarettes a day. The kitten's cough and sneeze disappeared in 48 hours without treatment other than lots of staff love and clean air.

Many practice owners are trying to determine whether to advertise more, use coupons, give discounts for clients returning late for vaccinations. I suggest we visit the local shelter and pick a couple of healthy kittens to show off in your reception area. It will not only save some lives but help increase the kitten traffic in your practice.

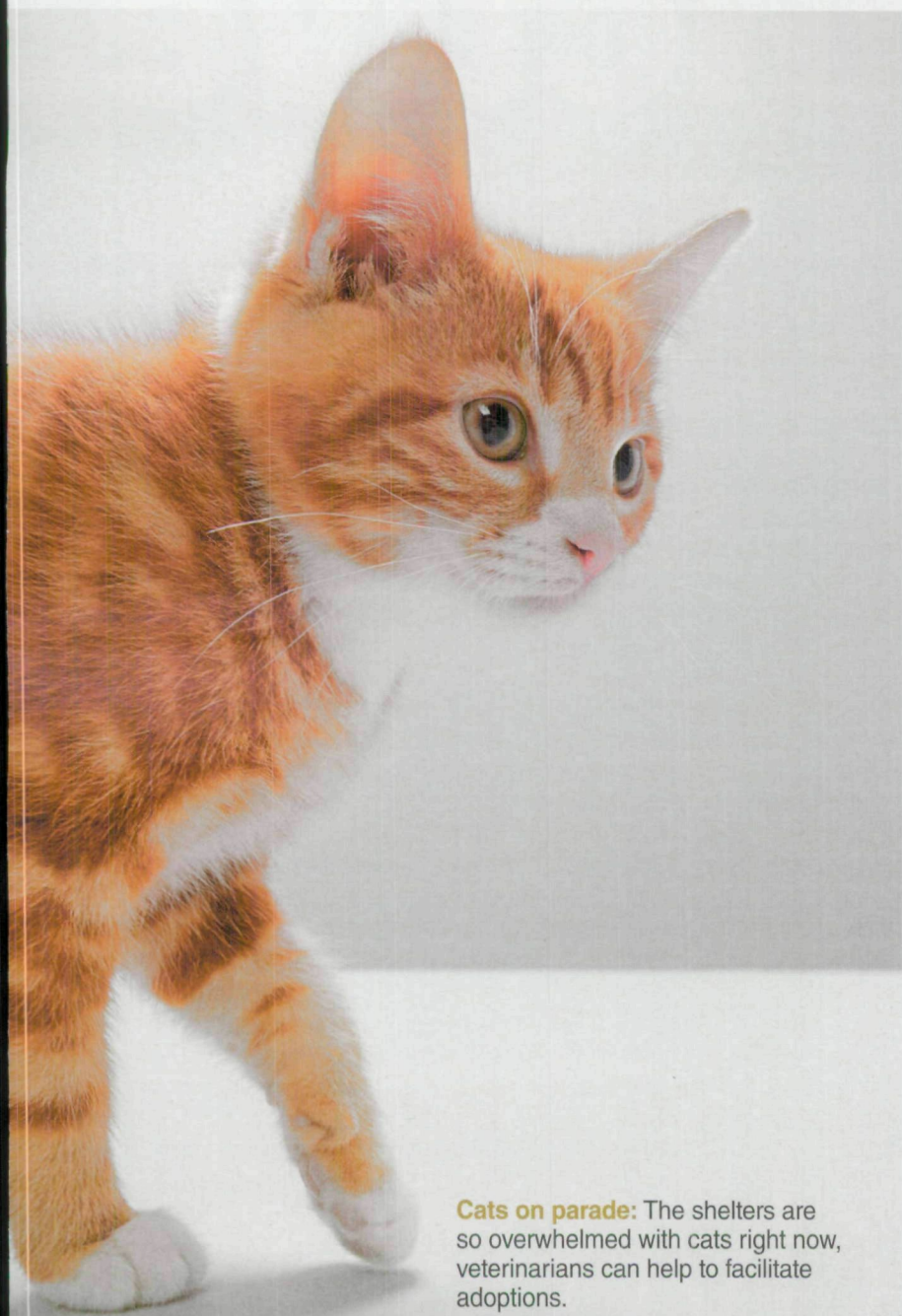
Maybe we all need to spend some of our charitable giving by facilitating pet adoptions. After all, don't you think an adoption by one of your current clients would offer better odds that you will see the cat again?

It's been said that a pet's senior years are the most profitable years for veterinary practices. I totally disagree. Senior pet visits start with the first pediatric visit.

One last thing: Don't be surprised to see some of your clients making donations to your new Love At First Sight Kitten Adoption Program.

To date, I have adopted more kittens in four weeks than the shelter had all year. The majority of my clients do not visit the local shelter, but they do come see us several times at least during the first year with the new addition to their family. **dvm**

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Cats on parade: The shelters are so overwhelmed with cats right now, veterinarians can help to facilitate adoptions.

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