Moving towards being "cat friendly": a case study

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Gemma qualified as a veterinary nurse in January 2015 after many years working towards achieving this. Before becoming a qualified Veterinary Nurse, Gemma completed a BTEC National Diploma in Animal Care and an Animal Nursing Assistant course. Since qualifying, Gemma has completed her ISFM certificate in Feline Friendly Nursing and is now a Feline Friendly Nurse at her practice. It was her goal to become a Feline Friendly Nurse. With her love for cats she wanted to "make a change" in her practice and felt this was the perfect way of doing it. Currently working towards becoming a Cat Friendly Clinic, Gemma continues to have ideas and wants to develop and implement them into her practice even more. Gemma is keen to learn more about cats and will be starting an ISFM Advanced Certificate in Feline Behaviour later this year.
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Developing the practice I work for into a Cat Friendly Clinic is something I have thought about for a long time, so when I started the ISFM (International Society of Feline Medicine – International Cat Care's veterinary division) Certificate in Feline Friendly Nursing course, it was the perfect opportunity for me to do this in a more informed way. I have started implementing some of the suggestions I have learned on this course and through making some simple changes, we have already improved the look and the feel of the practice remarkably.

Cats like to sit higher than at floor level, so simply by providing three IKEA tables down the centre of the cat area has made clients realise that we want their cats to feel more calm and secure when visiting the practice and have a less stressful visit overall. We have placed a laminated sign in this area informing them that these tables are for cats (not for magazines/handbags, etc.), allowing their cat to sit and face them rather than being placed on the floor. The area that we have is a small section of the waiting room, but it is not completely separated from dogs; the dogs still have to walk past the cat area to get to the consult rooms. So future plans include placing a barrier alongside the cats' waiting area to completely section it off, reducing the contact between them, and so minimising the stress to the cats. In the meantime, the tables at least provide a "safe" zone for the cats, who feel more secure off the ground. We have also added some blankets, placing them in a wicker basket to give a more homely and friendly feeling to the area. Again, a laminated sign is in place informing clients that they can use these blankets to place over the cat carrier, shielding their view of other animals. We chose pink and blue ones; pink

Figure 1. Cat area with just blankets on the shelf added

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Figure 2. Cat area with a new sign and IKEA tables added

to stay with the ICC colour and we added blue after a client with male cats requested these when they saw the pink ones! Finally, we now regularly keep a 'Feliway' plug-in (Ceva Animal Health) in the cat area which our clients have commented on, saying it does have a calming effect on their cat during their visit.

After attending the BSAVA Congress this year and speaking to Cats Protection League (CPL), I have discovered some very useful client information. CPL was happy to provide my practice with some mini booklets which are free of charge to order. These have been so popular with our clients and we display them in the cat area for clients to take away should they choose.

We noticed that when our hospitalised cats were in their cages, they all seemed to want to hide under blankets and bedding. So we wanted to make small changes to the space they have in the cage by creating a hideaway area for them. After shopping around we bought some easy to clean plastic stools. These are very popular with the cats as they can sit on the top or they can hide underneath and still have enough room to move around the cage freely. We place a blanket over the stools to add comfort and also so they can't see out if they want to hide.

Finally, we were aware that cats can be easily frightened by the noise of clippers, so we wanted to change this. We have therefore purchased some small, quiet clippers to use to clip cats' legs only which has proved successful in helping to keep them calm during this pre-op process.

Creating a cat-friendly practice and moving towards official ICC "Cat Friendly Clinic" status is easy to start and does not have to cost very much. For our practice, this is only the beginning in trying to create a cat-friendly atmosphere. Overall, we are very happy with the changes we have made; we have happy clients and, most importantly, happy cats.

Cat Friendly Clinic
isfm
catfriendlyclinic.org

Figure 3. Baskets can be placed onto the tables off the ground

Figure 4. Blanket placed over the cat carrier

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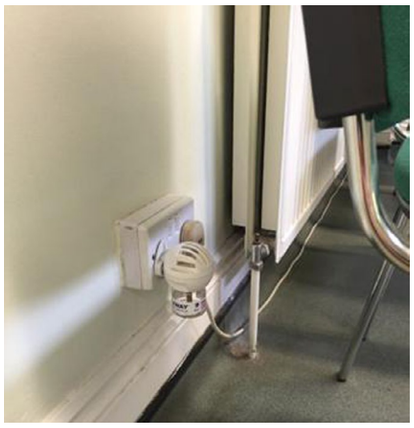

Figure 5. "Feliway" plugin

Figure 6. Laminated sign on the cat tables

Figure 7. Laminated sign on blanket basket

Figure 8. Blue and pink blankets

What is a "Cat Friendly Clinic"?

Launched in 2012, the Cat Friendly Clinic programme is an accreditation scheme, run by charity International Cat Care's veterinary division, ISFM, to raise awareness of and educate veterinary practices about the specific needs of cats visiting or being hospitalised in veterinary clinics.

Figure 9. The cat waiting room at present

Assessment for the accreditation award is based on three broad criteria: the healthcare team's *attitude and approach* towards feline patients and their owners; good feline *clinical practice*; and having appropriate cat-friendly *clinic structure and equipment*. All of these factors contribute toward driving the highest standard of welfare for feline patients.

Read more on www.catfriendlyclinic.org for a guide and helpful advice.

Figure 10. Blankets in cat area

The ISFM Feline Friendly Nursing Certificate

This certificate is aimed at nurses in training or qualified with a particular interest in cats and is completed over 1 year. The course aims to cover feline health and behaviour and provide a broad knowledge of the species. Teaching covers understanding feline behaviour and its relevance to veterinary practice and your clients, cat-friendly practice principles, practical feline nursing, including preventative healthcare, common infectious diseases, feline-specific pharmacology and analgesia, as well as feline nutrition. Read more at http://icatcare.org/learn/nurses/distance-education-course/certificate. Nurses completing this course can use the post-nominals ISFMCertFN.

Figure 11. Cat stool in a cat cage

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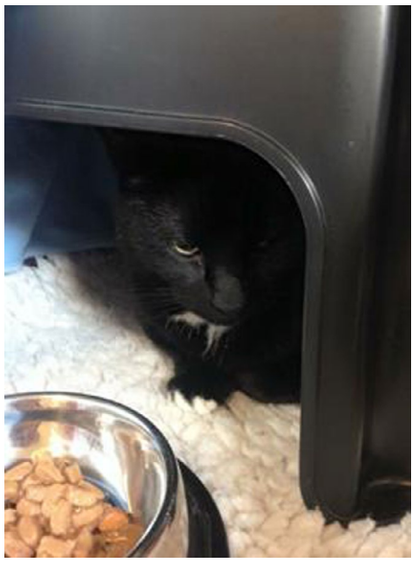

Figure 12. Stool in the cat cage for the cats to sit on or hide under

Figure 13. Cat stool

Figure 14. Cats Protection League mini booklets for clients to take away

Developing Cattitude

If you are not able to become an accredited Cat Friendly Clinic (and nearly every clinic can), you can still show your cattitude! The Developing Cattitude one-day training course onboard Bertha the training bus was launched in 2015 and is designed to demonstrate practical ways in which your practice can become truly cat-friendly.

Developing cattitude

With evidence telling us how difficult cat owners find it coming to the vets, those attending the course learn all about how to help address some of the common issues that clients face. Delivered by Onswitch and in conjunction with International Cat Care and Martha Cannon BA VetMB DSAM(fel), RCVS-recognised Specialist in Feline Medicine from The Oxford Cat Clinic, this course is ideal for those practices who wish to ensure that their cat owners receive a five-star experience (for them and their cat) when bringing them in.

The course takes attendees through a feline-specific customer journey with the use of videos of pet-owner focus groups. These observed discussions clearly show how the cat owners feel about their pets and the concerns and worries they have about having to visit the vets.

With the client journey beginning before the cat and owner are in the waiting room, the morning part of the course is devoted to the non-clinical aspects of cattitude. This means that it is invaluable to those team members who have responsibility for promoting and marketing the practice to new and existing clients, as well as those who answer the phone when the client phones up to talk to them. The reception team often do not know that they can specifically help cat owners – they will benefit from learning how they can help create a positive cat experience.

After a hot pub lunch, the afternoon focuses on the clinical aspects of cattitude and benefits vets, veterinary nurses, students and nursing assistants who interact with cats in the consulting room or as an inpatient.

With a detailed video lesson from Martha about cat handling (with a cat who was not too happy to oblige – very much "real life"!) as well as tips on common cat-related procedures, this course benefits the whole practice team, including the clinicians. Ultimately it ensures that your cattitude is developed so that your feline-owning clients visit when their cats need it, and don't put it off.

One of the problems of such a good course is remembering which bits to tell your colleagues about and what to start implementing first! This is why Onswitch send you a link to the course on the Cx Club website, giving you one month's access to view the course again and show your colleagues in the clinic. This allows you time to discuss and reflect on what you have learned together, before implementing any new cattitude learning. With a CPD certificate for 5 h CPD for those attending and the option for other team members to view the course and record their CPD too, this course is highly recommended. Previous attendees have said:

> Excellent practical ways to improve welfare of cats when visit(ing) the vets and improving practice morale.
>
> The day was presented in a very practical way and gave me lots of ideas of ways I could improve the experience of cats and their owners when they visit my practice. The presentation of owners' opinions of what they thought about their vets was very surprising at times. There was time to discuss with other delegates their ideas and ways of doing things too.
>
> I am aiming to get Cat Friendly Status for my practice so found the ideas of things that can be done as far as waiting room separate areas for cats/dogs and cat hospitalisation areas very useful.
>
> A lot of the ideas did not involve buying expensive equipment or doing major building work but just thinking in a different way!

To find out more about the Developing Cattitude course and when Bertha is next in your area, take a look here:

http://www.onswitch.co.uk/en/page/Developing+Cattitude/

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