

Adding value when asking for payment

Nowadays, there's no such thing as a free service, yet why do so many veterinary practices find it difficult to ask for payment? Caroline Johnson BSc(Hons) continues her advice on adding value in the practice and explains how payment needn't be such a grey area.

1. Talk through the bill

When giving the client the bill, talk through every item listed before presenting the total. That way, the client gets to see exactly what is involved in every procedure so that the pounds charged then appear good value for money. For example, many clients will not understand that 'running tests' may consist of a general anaesthetic, X-ray, blood sampling and analysis, painkillers and so on. In talking through an itemised bill you will demonstrate the value of all you have done.

2. When you've given something extra tell them

When talking through the bill, give brief explanations where necessary. For example, "we've used a special anaesthetic to give added safety owing to Fido's heart problems (propofol), hence the additional charge here on the bill" or "he may feel a little pain after the procedure, so to reduce his discomfort we have given him the latest painkillers" or "when dematting Charlie, we found a tick attached to him, so we've applied the latest in flea and tick control, which should keep him clear of parasites for the next month".

3. Invest in training

From a clients' perspective, the most important area of the practice is the bit they see and the people they meet. Ensure that reception staff are fully trained, comfortable with presenting bills and with taking a client through an itemised invoice in a way which demonstrates the value of your service. Role-plays with reception staff can be used to build confidence where appropriate.



4. An invoice speaks a thousand words

I once used a garage that had the slogan 'big enough to cope, small enough to care', and which was used on every piece of literature they produced. Succinctly summarise what your practice is about or what it offers and capture this in a simple slogan and print your logo and your slogan on the bottom of every invoice. This means that the invoice will say more about you than what you charge! For an example of a slogan closer to home, the British Veterinary Association's strap line is 'Giving Vets a Voice'; short, sweet and brilliant.

5. Follow up

A visit to the hairdresser, dentist or chiropractor would not be complete without a request to book another appointment. The benefit to the business is clear, but since uptake is usually high, then there must also be benefits for those of us who make future bookings. Organise your practice so that you can book future appointments wherever possible. Cats and dogs need to be wormed several times a year and, therefore, if you offer a 'pill popping' service then you could book the animal in with a nurse for the next wormer to be administered. What about the next health check and vaccination? The opportunities are endless. Select key services and take future appointment bookings.