

The client's journey

Day 2

3.30pm

Why aren't weekends longer? There never seems to be enough time to fit everything in, particularly where there are children involved. Nevertheless, it's the beginning of a new week and once I've finished work tonight, I'll collect Poppy, our Labrador, from home and then race over to the vets for her check-up. I know it's just a little thing but their later evening appointments on Mondays and Thursdays really do help when you're at work all day.

6.25pm

No time to waste, I've just grabbed Poppy from home and we're on our way to the vets. The traffic is still quite heavy and I'm not quite sure where I'm going but I'm pretty sure that it's somewhere around the West side of town. I wish now that I'd asked them for a map or for directions – they probably have a map printed on their brochure but I never asked for one. I suppose that, in the summer, it would be easier to find when the evenings are light but in these dark, wintry evenings I'm really rather dependent on their having clear and obvious signs.

6.45pm

Well I've finally found it and it was pretty much where I thought but there's a hedge which has grown up to block out some of the sign and, in the dark, it's not really clear. Still, we're here now and all I have to do is find somewhere to park. Amazingly, there are two free spaces right outside and there's even a "dropping-off" space with a ten minute maximum waiting time. What a great idea!

The reception area looks really bright and inviting as we go through the door and, even though it's quite warm (thankfully) there's no smell at all and everything looks really clean. I know that sounds silly but, if it didn't look and smell clean, I think that would colour my judgement about how good the practice might be.

Even though it's getting late, there are two receptionists at the front desk. One appears to be dealing with the phones mainly while the other receptionist looks after clients. Everyone is really friendly and pleasant and none of the other people here with their pets look stressed or as if they've been waiting too long so that's a hopeful sign!

I've been given a form to fill in as we're new to the practice and shown to the right-hand side of the waiting room with a nice little cartoon sign saying "Dogs - this way". The cats are all over on the other side so that's a good sign for the future when I have to bring Biggles, our cat, into the practice.

The form is quite simple and written in a friendly style – not at all stuffy or too formal – it asks sensible questions like is Poppy neutered, how old she is, what's her history of vaccinations, worming and flea treatments, that sort of thing and, on the back it's got a space for me to say what I like and what I don't like about this practice. I'm meant to take it in with me to see the vet and then hand it in at the desk when I've finished.

The thing I like best is the space that asks me how I'd like them to contact me when it's necessary – by our home phone, by my mobile number, by e-mail even by text if I prefer. That's really good!

There are a number of leaflets in racks and some posters discussing things like vaccination and other health topics but I really like the one that says that it doesn't matter if I forget something that the vet might say to me as there's a telephone hotline where I can simply ask a nurse for advice or help. These are all small things for the practice to offer but it shows that they've thought about it, even putting themselves in my shoes perhaps and I feel re-assured by that.

7.00pm

My appointment was for 6.55pm and they're clearly very busy but when the vet came out to collect us, she still seemed very friendly and not stressed at all which is a relief!

Best of all, she came out and called Poppy's name and then came over to make friends with Poppy even before we went through to the consulting room. That's so good as there's nothing more certain to raise the adrenaline levels as when the vet seems stressed too!



7.25pm

Well that's it, we've seen the vet, poppy's had her check-up, we've had a chat with the nurse about feeding Poppy differently and about flea control for the house and we're on our way home.

The consultation was really easy as the vet looked at the form I'd filled in, explained about which vaccinations were necessary now and which others could wait and then she filled in a little diagram on a separate sheet, marking the things she'd checked as she gave Poppy the once-over. It didn't take long but it seemed quite thorough; you don't mind paying when you know something's been done properly, do you?

Best of all, it seems Poppy is quite healthy, a bit overweight but by doing something to reduce her calories now, we can save her from damage to her joints and other diseases of the heart and kidneys later on in life. We've got some special food to take away and a course of treatment to prevent fleas. We had a good discussion about which vaccinations were needed and she seemed very interested in where we walk Poppy along the river bank. She even gave me a pack of additional information about the practice, which I can read when I get home. That's a nice touch and not one that I've encountered before. I guess it might have been even more useful if she'd mailed it to me so I could read up about the practice before the consultation but it's nice all the same.

All in all, I think this has been a great success and I won't hesitate to bring Biggles here for a check up. The vet seemed to think that his strange behaviour might be something to do with him having moved into another cat's territory and that it might not mean that he's ill at all. Apparently, you can learn a lot by a pets' behaviour that I just had no idea about and, of course, I can call the number on the waiting room poster more or less anytime for more advice. I think I'll bring Biggles in next week to get him checked over anyway.

Now let's just get home shall we Poppy?

Checklist.

If only every vet knew....

- Sending out a welcome pack gives a new customer time to read about the practice and, if they include information leaflets, think about any issues they may want to discuss at the consultation
- Clear, unobstructed signage is more important than most people realise. It reduces stress and says so much about the practice before clients ever cross the threshold
- Easy parking is a huge asset but if that's not always possible, some form of managed parking can really help
- Clinic times to accommodate commuters are hugely appreciated by these clients
- A friendly greeting, calling the pet by her name, goes a very long way towards client satisfaction
- Clients are happy to pay when they see what has been done. A simple explanation during a consultation, pointing out what has been checked adds real value. In the main, people don't mind paying if they know what they're paying for is good value
- Asking for client feedback is both invaluable as a means of gathering information and also as a method of letting clients know that you value their opinion.