Guide on the Communication Learning Modules
IHC Veterinary Communication Project

Adapted from the Institute for Healthcare Communication (IHC) Veterinary Communication Project, learning modules are now available as an educational resource for veterinarians and veterinary teams for improving communication skills on a variety of topics in veterinary medicine.

Building Trust with Clients

This self-study module series supports veterinarians in understanding the essential communication tools for building trust with clients. It lays the foundation for the core communication skills that are used in subsequent modules. ***It is suggested to take the Building Trust with Clients module series as a prerequisite to other modules.***

- Part 1: Why Communication Matters (35 minutes)
- Part 2: Essential Tools – Nonverbal Awareness (30 minutes)
- Part 3: Essential Tools – Open-ended Inquiry, Reflective Listening, and Empathy (35 minutes)
- Final Quiz

Learning Objectives
1. Gain an understanding why communication matters in veterinary practice.
2. Identify essential tools in communicating with clients: nonverbal awareness, open-ended inquiry, reflective listening, empathy.
3. Practice and incorporate into day-to-day practice these essential tools for building trust with clients.

Breaking the Silence: Discussing Medical Errors with Clients

This self-study module supports veterinarians in discussing medical errors ethically and constructively with clients. (65 minutes)

Learning Objectives:
1. Describe a rationale for openness with clients following harm caused by error.
2. Identify steps to respond ethically and constructively with clients.
3. Demonstrate the use of a minimum of two techniques to rebuild trust with clients.

Compassion Fatigue in Veterinary Practice

This self-study module supports veterinarians in recognizing the symptoms of compassion fatigue and identifying strategies for limiting its effects and impact. (35 minutes)

Learning Objectives:
1. Describe and define compassion fatigue.
2. Recognize symptoms of compassion fatigue seen in the veterinary professional.
3. Identify strategies for limiting the effects of compassion fatigue.
4. Practice some of these strategies.
5. Commit to putting a self-care action plan into place.

Elephant in the Room: Money Talk with Clients

This self-study module supports veterinarians in effectively communicating about the costs of veterinary care and financial issues with clients.

Learning Objectives:
1. Identify emotional or behavioral responses to financial issues.
2. Describe three factors which may influence discussion of financial issues with clients.
3. Identify two skills to effectively communicate about financial issues with clients.
4. Choose two communication skills to practice discussing financial issues with your clients.

Euthanasia: Guiding Clients Through Difficult Decisions

This self-study module supports veterinarians in acknowledging a client's emotional and behavioural responses to euthanasia and using effective communication skills when discussing euthanasia with clients. (35 minutes)

Learning Objectives:
1. Identify skills to acknowledge clients' emotional and behavioural responses to euthanasia.
2. Demonstrate at least two client communication skills related to the euthanasia process.

Eye of the Beholder: Addressing Difficult Client Interactions

This self-study module supports veterinarians in understanding factors that contribute to conflict and using communication tools to address difficult client interactions. (60 minutes)

Learning Objectives:
1. Identify two factors that contribute to conflict.
2. Describe how thoughts and feelings regarding conflict influence behaviours/responses.
3. Identify approaches/styles for managing conflict.
4. Describe at least one communication tool for addressing conflict in client relationships.

Strangers in Crisis: Skills for Sharing Bad News

This self-study module supports veterinarians in engaging with clients in emergency situations and introduces a six-step communication protocol for sharing bad news with clients.

Learning Objectives:
1. Identify two skills for engaging with clients in emergency settings.
2. Describe a six-step communication protocol for sharing bad news
3. Demonstrate two strategies with examples for sharing bad news with clients.

Enhancing Client Adherence

This self-study module supports veterinarians in enhancing communication skills that foster client adherence to recommendations resulting in improved health for their animals. (60 minutes)

Learning Objectives:
1. Explain at least 2 benefits of adherence.
2. Identify at least 2 skills to improve adherence.
3. Demonstrate use of core skills to gain client perspective.
4. Apply 2 strategies to emphasize the value of a recommendation.

How can the module series be used?

Veterinarians and veterinary teams can take advantage of these learning modules to improve communication skills in veterinarian-client and team interactions. There are a number of ways the modules may be used:

- As a training resource for veterinary students, new veterinarians, or new veterinary team members
- As a Continuing Professional Development (CPD) activity for veterinarians and veterinary technicians
- As part of remediation activities in cases where communication is a concern (and in conjunction with other prescribed activities.)

To access the modules, veterinary team members are asked to provide the name of a sponsoring veterinarian. Sponsorship means that the veterinarian is aware of your plan to participate in the module, and it assists the College with informing veterinarians of these modules, so they may consider participating in them as well.

Self-Study Learning Plan

To harness the learning potential of the online communication learning modules, follow these steps:

- Identify those areas of communication that you need to work on:
  - Consider asking trusted sources for their feedback to assist you in identifying the areas to work on (i.e., colleagues, staff, clients)
- Establish learning goals
- Set your action plan to achieve your learning goals
- Implement your action plan by participating in selected online communication modules and practicing communication skills in real interactions
- Reflect on the impact of your learning to your practice

Establish Learning Goals

Reflect on your communication with clients; are there areas that need work? Are there situations that you find consistently challenging with respect to communication? Are there situations where you are left feeling unsatisfied about the interaction with the client?

Make these reflections into learning goals. Here are some examples:

- "I want to improve my conversations with clients about euthanasia."
- "I want to learn how to better manage difficult interactions with clients where there is conflict."

- "My learning goal is to improve my approach to sharing bad news with clients, including when a medical error has occurred."

Set Your Action Plan

The following is a suggested action plan:

- The first step is to watch the Building Trust with Clients online module; this module sets the foundation for the essential communication skills that build trust with clients and are used or referred to in the other modules.
- Select the online modules that will help you to achieve your learning goals
- Before watching the online modules, download the accompanying participant workbook. The workbook complements the module and serves as a guide for deliberate practice after viewing the module.
- After viewing each module, refer to the workbook to reflect on your learning. This includes noting your key take-aways. It also includes making an action plan for integrating your learning into practice.
- Practice your new skills. This can be done by role-playing with members of your team using exercises in the workbook. Then practice your skills with clients.
- Determine how you will know if any changes you implement are successful (i.e., feedback from colleagues, staff, clients; improved job satisfaction; improved client satisfaction).

Example Learning Module Selection

- Learning goal: to improve my communication skills when approaching euthanasia discussions with clients
- Online modules I will select to participate in:
    1. Building Trust with Clients
    2. Euthanasia: Guiding Clients Through Difficult Decisions
    3. Compassion Fatigue in Veterinary Practice

Learning modules can be found on the College website at:
www.cvo.org/Learning-Modules

Participants are invited to share their feedback on the module series by completing a brief survey.

The IHC Veterinary Communication Project was developed to address gaps in veterinarian-client communication training at veterinary schools. For more information about the IHC Veterinary Communication Project, visit http://healthcarecomm.org/veterinary-communication.