



Ten-step practice guide to setting up weight-management clinics

Laura Ann McDonnell, registered veterinary nurse, The Veterinary Hospital, Gorey, Co Wexford, outlines the 10 simple steps to setting up a pet weight-management clinic in your veterinary practice

The topic of obese and overweight dogs and cats has been widely covered, however, nursing clinics and establishing weight-management clinics has received little attention. This 10-step guide aims to help nurses in setting up a pet weight-management clinic.

1. COMMUNICATION

Veterinary nurses play a very important role in advising pet owners on prevention and reduction of obesity in pets. Good communication is essential. This begins with displaying posters, which highlight the condition of obesity in both cats and dogs. These are best-placed in the waiting room and reception where there is a captive audience and highest footfall. There are many display notices available highlighting the breeds of cats and dogs prone to weight gain, and of the ideal body condition score (BCS). These are available from the practices' pet-food supplier representative.

2. SUPPORT

The next contact should be in the consultation room. Veterinary surgeons and all staff in general, should be

supportive of the nurses' role in setting up the weight-management clinics. During consultations, if the veterinary surgeons see a dog or cat is overweight, they should suggest that the client bring their pet to see the nurse. All the information leaflets, signage and posters will inform the client that the clinics are available but, initially, it will often take the recommendation from the veterinary surgeon to reinforce the health benefits associated with a better diet and a reduction in weight.

3. LITERATURE

The final piece of communication is the business card or leaflet to be made available to the client. This should contain the name of the practice, contact details, nurses' name and clinic times. At this stage, the client should have been made aware that their pet is overweight and that the veterinary practice runs weight-management clinics and the times they are scheduled at. Whether the practice charges for these clinics is a matter of individual practice policy.

4. TIME

Allocate a specific time each week when the clinics will be

held. Ensure all staff members are aware that your other nursing duties will need to be covered during this time. Keep the clinic time consistent each week as this makes it easier for both the practice and the clients.

5. EDUCATION

It is recommended that nutritional continuous professional development (CPD) programmes are completed before commencing the weight-management clinic. There are many online weight-loss calculations available to calculate the amount of food a pet should be fed, such as that available on the Hills.ie website. The nurse should also contact their supplier of pet food and request as much supporting documentation as possible, such as weight-loss record cards, description of the food to be fed, and how to introduce the food gradually into the diet.

6. PRACTICE

It is recommended to undertake a few trials using the online calculator. This will enable one to become efficient and confident in its use prior to using it for a client's pet.

7. LOCATION

The preparatory work to set up the clinic has now been done so how do you approach a client regarding such a sensitive subject? It is recommended that the consultation is held in private. When choosing the times for the clinic, choose a time when the rooms are not in use for consultations with the veterinary surgeons. This will ensure optimal use of the premises but also guarantee the nurse clinic has a specific room each week.

8. EQUIPMENT

A pet-weighing scales is needed. While one might be placed in the kennels or reception/waiting room, it is also recommended that one is placed in the consultation room

where the clinic is to take place. Many dogs can be excited or nervous coming into the consultation room. Even if it takes a few moments for the dog to settle, allow plenty of time for the dog to relax in order that an accurate weight can be recorded. For cats, it might be best to weigh oneself first, remove the cat from the carrier and weigh again. The cat's weight is then established by subtraction. This is the least stressful and safest way for cats.

9. CALCULATION

Once a weight has been taken, it is now time to complete a full-body examination. Can you feel the ribs easily or do you have to gently push to feel them? Does the pet have a waist or is it straight? You can also do the head-to-tail measurement. Body measuring tapes are again available from the practices' food representative. With the weight taken and the BCS recorded, now enter these details in the Hills Quick Reco calculator. This is a step-by-step guide and once all details are entered, the recommended daily feeding amount will be available at the end.

10. STOCK

Ensure a complete and full range of food is available for both cats and dogs. Some may be both overweight and have joint problems. There is a specific type of food especially for such conditions. Keep a limited amount of both wet and dry food but always ensure that you have every type available.

CONCLUSION

More overweight pets are being presented to practices each day. The nurse can play an invaluable role in helping these pets reduce their weight and as such, have a better and longer life.

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Laura with some of her clients at the weight-management clinic.