

Inter-Clinic Cooperation and Communication: Are We Colleagues or Competitors?

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Veterinary medicine is fraught with communication challenges and the area of inter-clinic interaction is no exception. We can enjoy positive and beneficial communications, for example when referring to doctors we have previously worked with. We already know the preferred process for information sharing and we are comfortable. Potentially more challenging situations may arise when clients have sought a second opinion or a colleague has criticized your treatment of a case.

Interestingly, there seems to be little published information about inter-clinic cooperation and communication. Thankfully, common sense and manners go a long way in this regard. Client requests for file transfers and discharge/follow-up notes from referrals should occur as promptly as possible. The value of medical records that are complete and legible cannot be overstated. The telephone should be viewed as a valuable piece of technical equipment.

Perhaps the most useful and informative bit of information I came across was the SVMA by-laws (sections 32.4 through 32.8). In the by-laws we read that we should strive to approach all our communications with a spirit of professionalism that fosters the client's (and I say our) confidence in the practise of veterinary medicine. It is so important that we avoid criticism of other veterinarian's service to clients; it is mentioned not once, but four times. It is not just being nice; it is a professional duty.

As Dr. Patty Khuly writes in her article on suicide in *Veterinary Practise News*, "we should worry more about ensuring all our colleagues have a nurturing, supportive and judgement-free profession to work in". We are a small profession and sadly, we often seem to practise in relative isolation, many of us never having met or even spoken with other veterinarians in our own towns. Inter-clinic cooperation would be a lot easier in many respects if we knew the person on the other end of the communication.

1. *Veterinary Practise News, Off Leash, pg. 48, November 2014.*
2. *SVMA by-laws accessed online January 15, 2015.*