

# Being cat friendly in everyday practice

It is well recognised that, because of their unique nature and needs, taking a cat to a veterinary clinic can be very stressful, both for the cat and also the owner. The Cat Friendly Clinic programme, run by the International Society of Feline Medicine, is designed to help address these issues. The scheme aims to create more cat friendly veterinary clinics and so reduce the stress for the cat, making veterinary visits easier for cat owners as well. Here, Liz Jefferson provides a personal view of what being cat friendly means to her and how it has been achieved in her practice.

Cats are very individual pets and definitely have their own ways. It's an old veterinary saying that cats are not small dogs — and they really aren't! In particular, cats react very differently to new surroundings and new people. My saying is 'they own you, you don't own them'. Basically, cats just like to be in charge.

In my view, being cat friendly means a great deal more than just having a certificate placed on the wall. I am very passionate about cats and how they are treated and handled throughout the veterinary working day.

What the 'Cat Friendly Clinic' certificate does show is that our practice understands that cats are different and that they need to be

## Key point

Do your receptionists understand what it means to be a CFC? They are the first contact owners have with the clinic; make sure they are telling clients you care about cats and are advising them appropriately.



Liz Jefferson  
RVN

*Liz Jefferson started working at Blacks Vets, UK, in August 1996 as a student veterinary nurse. She completed a NVQ in animal care in 1997, passed her Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) pre-veterinary nursing examination in 1998 and immediately enrolled on the RCVS course for veterinary nursing. She qualified as a registered veterinary nurse in 2003. She became head nurse of the second biggest branch practice at Blacks Vets and was promoted to branch manager in 2013. She is particularly interested in feline medicine, feline nursing and emergency and critical care.*

treated and handled accordingly. They have different needs, require different ways of being handled, and they get presented to the clinic with many feline-specific illnesses, resulting in completely different treatment plans.

## But what does being a Cat Friendly Clinic actually mean?

Cat Friendly Clinic (CFC) is an accreditation scheme developed by the International Society of Feline Medicine (the veterinary division of the charity International Cat Care). It has changed the way in which cats



**Figure 1:** The ISFM Cat Friendly Clinic scheme is relaunching in 2017 with six new official sponsors. See [www.catfriendlyclinic.org](http://www.catfriendlyclinic.org)

are treated in veterinary clinics. Being cat friendly means exactly what it says; we have met lengthy criteria to be officially recognised as a CFC by the International Society of Feline Medicine (Figure 1).

CFC accreditation shows clients we understand the needs of their cats and have special equipment and more calming ways to treat cats. To clients, pets are part of the family and loved very dearly, so the cats in our care are treated as if they are our own.

### What do we do as a Cat Friendly Clinic?

#### When cat clients ring the surgery

Our experienced staff have been trained to talk to clients about what it means to be cat friendly – that is, we treat cats differently at our surgery. This includes information about:

- What being a silver CFC practice actually means.
- Helping clients introduce their cats to their carriers to help smooth the journey to the surgery. (Studies have shown that 60% of owners recognise their cats get stressed going to the vet and nearly 40% of owners get stressed just at the thought of a veterinary visit).
- Booking appointments for nervous cats at a quieter time of day. This could be at the start or

end of the day or when lots of cat appointments are booked together.

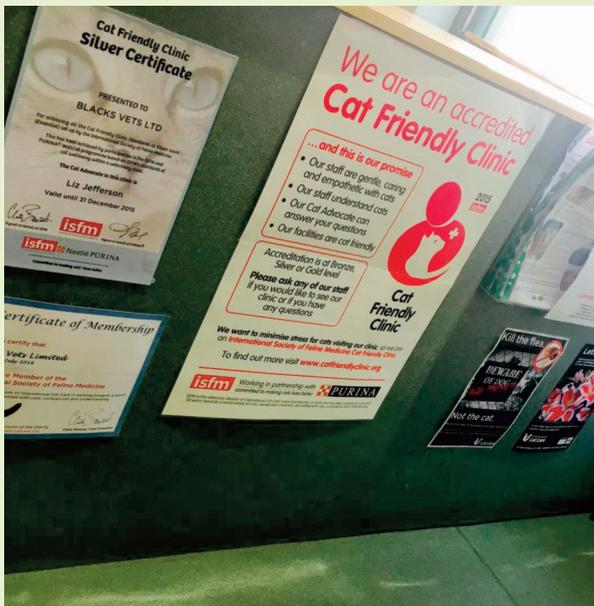
- Using the CFC information sheets (see [www.icatcare.org/catfriendlyclinic/client-leaflets](http://www.icatcare.org/catfriendlyclinic/client-leaflets)), emailing or posting them to both new and old clients, and using the information when talking on the phone, giving advice on getting your cat into the carrier, and so on.



**Figure 2:** Our cat-only waiting area

#### When clients enter the surgery with their cat

- All clients and their cats are directed to the cat-only waiting area (Figure 2).
- Clients are encouraged to place cat carriers on the chairs next to them, on top of the desk when talking to receptionists, or on the reception 'cat parking' table, rather than on the floor.
- Large towels are given to clients who have very nervous cats, or if the waiting room is busy, to place over the carrier so cats feel secure, hidden and can't see the rest of the waiting area and its inhabitants.
- If the reception area becomes too



**Figure 3:** Telling clients we care about cats and are a Cat Friendly Clinic



**Figure 4:** Information leaflets to help our clients when they return home

busy or noisy, very nervous cats may be placed into a separate room or our separate waiting area to wait for their appointment.

- The cat-only area has CFC information leaflets and cat magazines for clients to read while waiting for their appointment. There are also notice boards with information about our CFC status (Figure 3), the practice cat advocate nurse, and on common diseases or seasonal threats, such as antifreeze, lily toxicity and kidney disease.
- When clients leave the surgery, they are given literature about giving cats medication if their pet is sent home with any tablets or other medication (Figure 4).

### Tip

While taking a history from the client, the carrier door should be opened to allow the cat to explore the room if it wishes to.



### When cats see our vets

- Cats are placed onto the vet's examination table still in their carrier. The carrier door is opened and the cat is allowed to come out of its own free will, during which time the vet talks to the client about their visit.
- Towels pre-sprayed with Feliway (CEVA) are placed on the consult table in front of the opened carrier to help the cat feel more at ease, and prevent it feeling startled by the cold aluminium/plastic examination table.
- For top-opening carriers, cats are gently supported and lifted from their carrier onto the towel by their owners.
- If cats are really reluctant to come out of their carrier (particularly the front-loading variety), the carrier is very subtly tilted to encourage the cat to place its front paws onto the towel, and then the carrier very gently moved away.
- Cats are allowed to roam the consulting rooms as necessary to make them feel at ease while the vet is talking to their owners.

## A closer look at...



**Figure 5:** A set of scales should be kept in the consulting room. This allows accurate recording of the cat's weight, without using scales that dogs have been weighed on

- As cats may be roaming free on the floor, signs on the doors of vets' rooms state when cats are in consultation, to ensure no other member of staff walks into the room.
- Small or paediatric stethoscopes are used on cats when auscultating the chest/heart. This reduces stress as the stethoscope head is much smaller and fits more comfortably under their left or right elbow area. It also allows for more accurate auscultation.
- When examination of the cat takes place, and depending on

### Admitting cats

When admitting cats to the hospital, clients are taken away from reception/consulting area into a separate quiet room in the hospital building. This enables the admission process to be quiet and stress-free. This also gives nurses more time to discuss the cat's needs, its current medication, diet and so on.

Clients are encouraged to view the CFC boarding area if they wish and to place the cat into its accommodation themselves if they prefer.

the cat, constant soft stroking and gentle talking can help to reduce stress.

- Injections are normally drawn up with a 21 g (green) needle and this is then changed for a 23 g (blue) needle for administering the subcutaneous injection.
- Accurate weights are recorded, using small scales in the consulting room (Figure 5).

### Tip

Use ceramic bowls for food and water, to avoid the reflections in stainless steel, and potential tainting of plastic.



### Cat hospital wards

The ward is specifically designed for cats only and includes the following:

- Cages are medium-sized and do not face each other; this prevents stress from cats seeing each other and also reduces the risk of contamination between cats.
- Each cage has a soft Vetbed that has been sprayed with Feliway, a dark 'hidey box' and a litter tray. Allowing the cat to hide makes it feel more secure.
- If a cat is very nervous, dark towels are placed over the entire cage door.
- We have different types of litter available to encourage cats to use the litter trays. Some cats prefer the grey gravel type as opposed to wood pellets, for example.
- Shallow litter trays are used to make it easier for cats to get in and out of the trays, especially if they are elderly and arthritic or have IV infusion sets connected.
- Feliway diffusers (CEVA) are used constantly and are changed every month.

- Catnip toys are placed in the cage along with string toys hanging from the inside of the cage doors to encourage cats to play, depending on their age, illness and preferences.
- 'Quiet' signs are placed in the cat ward to reduce noise and stress for the cats.
- Ceramic food and water bowls are used as cats generally prefer these to ones made of plastic and metal.

### Tip

Place a towel previously sprayed with Feliway (CEVA) on the examination or procedures table to provide the cat grip. The towel can be used for gentle restraint. Note that Feliway should be used at least 15 minutes before the towel is needed.



### Nursing and hospital treatment

There are some general rules in place within the cat ward to keep stress to a minimum for feline patients. These include:

- 'Quiet' signs put up in the prep area when cats are being examined or anaesthetised.
- Dogs are never walked past cat cages or allowed to be examined at the same time as cats or in the same room.
- When carrying cats from their cages, nurses are encouraged to hold the animal close to them, their front legs between their fingers of one hand with the other hand supporting the hind legs. This makes cats feel more comfortable and supported when they are being carried.
- Towels may be placed over a cat's head/body when being carried if it is particularly nervous.
- We use small, quiet clippers when clipping a cat's leg or neck for venepuncture. These are kept specifically for cats and never used on other species. Clipper noise is very stressful to cats, so the quieter the better.
- Surgical spirit and chlorhexidine scrub are placed onto cotton wool and very gently rubbed onto the skin rather than applying using noisy sprays with strong odours.
- Cats having catheters placed have their leg shaved and EMLA anaesthetic cream applied at least 45 minutes prior to the procedure. The EMLA cream ensures that the cat doesn't feel any discomfort and keeps completely still for the placement. It is especially helpful in very small and elderly cats. Remember to cover the cream with an occlusive dressing and leave adequate time for it to work.
- Subcutaneous injections are given using a 23 g (blue needle) and intramuscular injections are given using a 25 g (orange) needle.
- Cats are never scruffed when being examined, restrained for general anaesthetics, or for blood samples and other procedures.
- On the prep tables, cats are placed on a towel pre-sprayed with Feliway (CEVA).
- Our general anaesthetic machines

### Our cat friendly venepuncture technique

For venepuncture, a towel pre-sprayed with Feliway is gently wrapped around the cat's body to make it feel secure and at ease. Its head is gently held with one hand and raised up. Veterinary nurses or technicians are encouraged to talk quietly to the cats. Occasionally, as a distraction, another nurse will gently stroke the cat's head during venepuncture so it does not concentrate on what the vet is doing.

## A closer look at...

are specifically for cats/small animals under 10 kg.

- Catheters used for cats are 23 g or 25 g only (blue and yellow), depending on the size of the cat.
- Blood samples are taken only with a 25 g (orange) needle unless otherwise indicated.
- All anaesthetised cats have their blood pressure monitored during their procedures. A Doppler blood pressure machine is used (Figure 6).
- A laryngeal scope is used for placement of endotracheal (ET) tubes, to ensure a smooth, accurate and less irritant placement.
- We have multiple ET tubes of different sizes to ensure the correct size is used.
- Micropore (3M) tape is used to hold catheters in place, to ensure easier removal and prevent pulling the fur. Eaze-off Spray (Millpledge Veterinary) is also used, to reduce the stickiness of the bandage for even easier removal.
- After a catheter is removed, Micropore tape is again used so it is easy for clients to remove at home.
- Hospitalised cats wear soft buster collars to reduce stress.
- Cats are gently groomed, stroked and quietly talked to several times during the day to provide reassurance during their stay.
- Nurses are constantly caring for the cats on recovery, checking vital



**Figure 6:** A Doppler blood pressure monitor is useful for diagnosing hypertension and monitoring blood pressure under anaesthesia

## When a cat is discharged

It is important owners are given enough information before taking their cat home so that the correct level of care can continue. This includes:

- Sending the client home with a detailed discharge sheet that has been specifically tailored for cats only.
- An ISFM Cat Friendly Clinic information sheet about taking your cat home from the surgery and how to give it tablets or eye drops (as appropriate for the cat's situation — see [www.icatcare.org/catfriendlyclinic/client-leaflets](http://www.icatcare.org/catfriendlyclinic/client-leaflets)).
- Food recovery packs, which are given to all cats on discharge when they have had a general anaesthetic. This light, palatable and highly digestible diet encourages the cat to eat when it gets home.
- We use International Cat Care/ISFM recognised 'Easy to Give' medications when we can (see <http://icatcare.org/cat-campaigns/easy-give>), to help clients cope with giving medicines and increase compliance.

signs and monitoring temperature, using blankets and heat pads as needed.

- Clients are regularly called postoperatively to let them know their cats are awake and eating.

## Conclusions

Understanding the differences between cats and other species, and becoming a truly cat friendly clinic forms the basis of a good bond with your patients and, of course, your clients. Trust between clients and the practice is of the utmost importance. I want to ensure that clients are 110 per cent happy. They should know that we have their cats' interests at heart and that their cats are in the best place for whatever care they need. Becoming an ISFM Cat Friendly Clinic benefits cats, clients and staff.