



## QI Boxset

**Webinar/podcast transcript: Client's view of QI**

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RCVS Knowledge:

Welcome to the Quality Improvement Boxset by RCVS Knowledge – A series of webinars, podcasts, and video interviews for practices and practitioners.

Pam Mosedale:

So, hi everyone today, I'm going to be talking to Caroline Freedman. Caroline is a pet owner and has been the representative of pet owners on practice standards group for the last eight years. She has a dog Bertie at the moment, but has had many dogs in the past who've visited veterinary practices, both first opinion veterinary practices and referral veterinary practices. So it'll be really interesting to talk to Caroline today about her experiences, f visiting practices and about quality improvement. So, hi Caroline.

Caroline Freedman:

Morning Pam.

Pam:

So quality improvement. Those words might be a bit theoretical to the public, but basically what it's all about is a way that practices, and vets can make changes leading to better patient outcomes and better care for your pets and better learning for the practice as well. So is that something you'd expect practices that you visit to be engaging in?

Caroline:

Yes, I would. Pam, I think the pet owning public has becoming more knowledgeable, in inverted commas, with Google and things like that... And therefore, I think if practices are proactive in letting their clients know that they're always looking for ways to improve procedures and both surgical procedures and procedures within their practice, I think clients would be very grateful for that and expect that nowadays.

Pam:

Yeah, And we use words like quality improvement but what it's really about is practices talking about cases, discussing cases and making changes if necessary and I'm sure that's the kind of thing most clients would expect. Do you think?

Caroline:

They would very much expect that and would appreciate feedback from the practices that that actually is taking place, maybe even within the waiting room area, once we're allowed back into the waiting rooms. But I think keeping clients informed of what's going on because a lot goes on behind the scenes with the practice team. And therefore I think if that's relayed to clients, even while they're waiting for the appointment, clients are very interested in that.

Pam:

I think you're right. And they're interested in knowing the roles of different people within the practice too Aren't they.

Caroline:

Very much so. And knowing that I think that's very evident now with veterinary nursing, which has suddenly come on, it's a profession in its own right. And I think clients realize that registered veterinary nurses are doing a lot of different things to help care for the animals apart from the vet. So, yes, I think information in the waiting room about all this kind of topics of improvement and advancements would actually be very interesting to the client.

Pam:

So Bertie has he been for any procedures recently?

Caroline:

Yes. Well, touch wood, he is my healthiest dog I've had so far and I maybe shouldn't have said that, but yes, he just before lockdown, he got neutered and so he had surgical operation just before lockdown.

Pam:

Okay. And when you, when you had to sign the consent form for Bertie's procedure, did the practice explain to you some of the risks that might happen, some things that might go wrong?

Caroline:

Yes. They went into quite a lot of detail about what I was going to sign with the client consent form and obviously anaesthetic risks et cetera, were explained to me, and I was able to ask questions and get answers for any concern I had.

Pam:

Good. I'm glad to hear that because I think that's really something that people want to know, isn't it. I mean, we'd want to know ourselves if we went for a human procedure and I think it's really important. And if practices are doing clinical audit, then they may well have some figures that they can share with you. I don't know if the practice you went to had actual figures or just explained it to you.

Caroline:

I wasn't giving figures. But I think nowadays with human medicine, patients are more and more expecting to, I mean, often if you go for surgery, you will ask a surgeon, what's your success rate? How many operations have you done? So I think this is going to lead to this overlapping into veterinary medicine very much so. And I always make the point that I think the key point is that actually veterinary medicine is private medicine, therefore people do want it. The people, clients do feel they're paying for the service they're getting for their pet. I sometimes think they want more information.

Pam:

Yeah. I think being transparent as you say, is really, really important, isn't it? And practices can do their own clinical audits in house, which is great, but they can also benchmark them RCVS Knowledge have a surgical outcomes audit, where practices can benchmark their figures against the average. Now interesting what you said about private medicine, because when I went to a private hospital for an appointment in their waiting room, they had on the TVs about what the surgical site infection rate is nationally. And what theirs is. Do you think that kind of transparency would be good in a veterinary practice?

Caroline:

I think it would be excellent Pam and I think more and more it's a very good way for practices to engage with clients. Either, I know a lot of practices maybe have television screens up that can be up there. Even newsletters are sent out, or on Facebook. And I think all these things, if you keep communication with your clients, you'll end up keeping your clients for longer and they won't want to go to any other surgery. And I think that's so important because we're talking about, with a dog you're hoping to get maybe 12 to 15 years and you know, I don't think a lot of people want to keep changing veterinary practice. They want to stay with a veterinary practice and stay with vets and a team that they trust and look forward to bringing their pet to because they know they'll get the best of care.

Pam:

Absolutely. I agree Caroline. And veterinary professionals, nurses and vets, our aim is to deliver the best outcomes possible. Nobody goes to work to have an error happen, it's to have the best outcomes possible. So I think, and having good long-term relationships with clients makes communication much better and clearer and everything. So that's great. So just talking about errors one way, they're trying to reduce errors, cause obviously we can never prevent errors

come way, but one way they're trying to reduce errors in human medicine is by using surgical safety checklists, which basically means that somebody before a procedure checks, they've got the correct patient and they're going to operate on the right part of that patient. And they've checked for any allergies or anything like that. And these have started to become used more now in veterinary practices. So do you think that's the kind of thing clients would like to be reassured that was being used for their pet?

Caroline:

I actually, I think that would be very good. I think it would be very reassuring for clients to be told that prior to surgery, because often I feel with my previous pets, we went through quite a few surgical procedures and I often used to think it was all, it could sound very negative to clients. You know, the anesthetic, death rates, et cetera, et cetera. There was a lot of negatives to give clients prior to surgery. But I think if you are, if the vet actually presented all this checklist to the client and said, this is what we do once surgery starts, I think that would be very reassuring.

Pam:

Yeah, absolutely. And to say, these are the things we're trying to do to try and ensure that that obviously things will happen, but these, these are the systems we've got in place to make those things less likely to happen, you know. And checking swab counts and all that kind of thing. And having guidelines generally in the practice was some medical conditions too, you know, are all part of having those systems in place for safety.

Caroline:

Something that's struck me over the years with my previous pets, because I did spend a lot of time visiting vets, actually general practice and also, and referral hospital was when I [unaudible] what... not even surgical procedures, but what attention my pets were getting from the vets, the comments used to be that actually, it's just like a human hospital. In fact, it's even better than the human hospital. So, I think actually it's quite interesting, people who don't have pets don't realize what goes on within a veterinary practice and hospital and the level of care that takes place.

Pam:

I think that's right. And this is the way of letting them know a little bit about what goes on behind the scenes. Isn't it, as you say, reassuring people, but even in the best scenarios, sometimes things go wrong, don't they, and sometimes they're human errors and sometimes they're just things that happened. They're not even errors, but if that kind of thing happened with your dog as a result of a procedure or a treatment, what, what would you expect to happen?

Caroline:

I think Pam, I would expect honesty from the outset I'm being told or the earliest possible opportunity exactly what had happened. And I think that's so important. And also I would expect to be told that the practice had, you know, tried to find out why it had happened, the reasons for it happening and discussions have taken place and protocols being put in place so that this didn't happen again to another pet owning clients.

Pam:

Yeah. That's interesting. And I think, I think you're right and that, so practices might do things which we call significant event audits or root cause analysis. But basically, it's just looking at what happened and trying, trying to learn from it. And I think that trying to learn from it part is really important. Don't you?

Caroline:

I think acknowledging that something has gone wrong, and I think that's the other thing that veterinary surgeons are held in such high esteem by their clients that they don't want to admit that. And it's the same with human and human medicine, surgeons and GPs and all parts of the healthcare system. Nobody wants to admit a mistake has happened. The mistakes do happen, and it can be human error. It can be circumstances on that particular day. But I think if a client knows that the reasons for something ... a significant event happening and has been investigated and protocols have been put in place to stop, you know, to mitigate this happening again, I think that's very reassuring, very reassuring. And I don't think a vet should ever... If there is a case where an apology is needed, I don't think a vet should feel that makes them any less professional. In fact, I think it makes them more professional apologizing, cause sometimes a simple sorry is all a client really wants. They just want to be acknowledged that the treatment or whatever part of the procedure gone right. They just want to be acknowledged in the fact that they feel that it hasn't gone right, is right.

Pam:

Yeah. That's really interesting to get a client's perspective on it. Caroline, thank you. That's really interesting. And the other thing is we can probably involve clients a bit more positively, couldn't we? Not just when things go wrong.

Caroline:

Absolutely. I think practices have the ability nowadays with Facebook, with emails and within the surgery on the television screens of communicating with clients over a whole load of things. I've been involved in a client focus group at a practice. And I think that's a very good way forward of connecting with your clients and giving them the ability to communicate with you when things aren't going wrong. So that if things do go wrong, they feel more reassured that they will be listened to.

Pam:

But yeah, that's really interesting. Cause I think we assume what clients think, as vets and as veterinary nurses, we think, Oh, we won't, we won't do that because the clients wouldn't like it, or we will do that because the clients would like it, but we just make assumptions and assumptions are never good things are they. So, I agree with you. I think having client focus groups or client surveys.

Caroline:

Yes, absolutely. I think yes, client surveys is a very simple way to do it. You know, it wouldn't involve too much extra manpower in the reception area that could be a questionnaire. And I think I would say from dog owners that I know, They want to get involved, they want to get involved with the care of their pet, et cetera. So and feel a part of it. And the other thing, the other aspect I think is important, that communication takes place when things aren't going wrong is because if there is a, if there is a problem, the client feels more reassured that they will be listened to. And often I think if they don't, if that mechanism isn't in place, I think clients, if they're feeling a bit disgruntled, could just leave a practice and then that's bad publicity for that practice. So I think it's important for practices to actually have the ability to listen to their clients because often things can be diffused very easily just with a simple conversation and you have a happy client and a happy vet and a happy pet. So what could be better than that.

Pam:

Sounds perfect. I mean, I think we've, we've all read these things where a person who's happy, tells a couple of people and the person who's unhappy tells about 10 people.

Caroline:

Because I've heard that when I'm out dog walking, it's people often saying the first question is, well, what vet do you go to? It's a bit like if you have children, what school do they go? So I think it's very important to try and keep lines of communication open at all times and to listen.

Pam:

I think you're right. I think we have to listen to clients. And I think at the end of the day, we all have to be aware that we're all working as a team, the people in the practice and the owners as a team for the best outcome for that pet aren't we. and if we just keep that at the front of our mind that's the really important thing and we all want to make improvements. Gosh, that's been really, really fascinating, Caroline, thank you so much for your time. I've got a real, it's really given me an insight and hopefully will to other people listening to this on the client's views on these things somehow and how quality improvement is important to clients too. So thank you very much.

Caroline:

Thanks Pam. Thanks for giving me the opportunity. Bye.

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