/introduction

The teaching of non-technical competencies needs to be improved in veterinary schools, in order to meet the demands of a consumer driven society.

- Non-technical competencies, such as communication skills and the understanding of the human-animal bond, appear to be in most need of being taught more effectively

- The research supporting the previous statements are mainly based on the advice and feedback from veterinary undergraduates, veterinarians and academics.

There is limited research (on communication skills and the human-animal bond) based on the advice and feedback from the people who would benefit the most from improved veterinary non-technical competencies (i.e veterinary clients)

/main aims

To describe client expectations of veterinary competencies (technical and non-technical).

To determine the characteristics of “bonded” clients; and whether the human-animal bond influences clients perceptions of veterinary non-technical competencies.

/methodology

Participants in this survey were veterinary clients from two small animal veterinary surgeries in Brisbane, Australia.

- These clients (N=360) were mailed a Veterinary Client’s Perception and Expectation Questionnaire. Of these 205 (57% RR) returned completed surveys

The survey consisted of:

- 3 questions about technical and non-technical skills
- 10 what are the most important attributes or competencies that you look for when choosing to see a veterinarian?
- 2. what attributes or competencies or skills do you feel that veterinarians can improve upon?
- 3. what would happen to patients, or what would a veterinarian have to do before you decided not to return to see that veterinarian again?

A 20 item measure of the human-animal bond (the relationship a client has with his pet)

Table of results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q1. What are the most important attributes or competencies that you look for when choosing to see a veterinarian? (N=180)</th>
<th>Percentage (%) of identified responses for the competencies identified</th>
<th>Non-tech competency</th>
<th>Tech competency</th>
<th>Veterinary practice attributes</th>
<th>No improvements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>76</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Q2. What are some important attributes or competencies that veterinarians can improve upon? (N=180) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 48 | 12 | 8 | 36 |

| Q3. What type of behaviour or attitude would a veterinarian have to display towards you or your pet before you decided not to return to see that veterinarian again? (N=180) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 100 | 16 | 5 | N/A |

/bonded clients characteristics and perceptions of veterinary competencies

Characteristics of bonded clients:
- Allow their pet to sleep mostly on their bed or in their room, spend a lot of time interacting with their pet.
- Female, primary caretakers, live either on their own or with non-family members.
- Bonded clients have significantly greater agreement for veterinarians to be able to:
  - Recognise, acknowledge and foster the bond a client has with their pet.
  - Build rapport with the client, and focus on on the client centred care and concern.
  - Display basic effective verbal and non-verbal listening and communication skills

/conclusion

A major implication of this study is that veterinarians should be developing and improving their non-technical competencies, to the same degree as their technical skills.

Veterinarians are often concerned about losing clients or malpractice claims because of poor technical skills. However, at the very least, that veterinarians should be equally concerned about the display of poor non-technical competencies.

Veterinarians need to be able to identify and acknowledge the relationship a client has with their pet (human-animal bond). This in turn will allow veterinarians to adjust their communication appropriately.

- The results of the remainder of this survey will be used to guide curriculum development and continuing education for undergraduate students and practitioners.

Client expectations of veterinary competencies

Clients consistently identified non-technical competencies as more important than technical competencies for vets to have and improve upon. The veterinarian needs good rapport building and client centred behaviours (e.g. “the ability to cope with owners in time of crisis, with communication skills and good bed side manners” “asking me what I think is going on” “empathising with me about my concerns”)

- Pet centred care, concern and handling (e.g. basic verbal and non-verbal communication behaviours (e.g.)
  - client’s will not return to a see that veterinarian ever again if the veterinarian displays poor non-technical skill, such as:
    - being patronising, dismissive or arrogant towards them (e.g. “being cold, superior... treating me like I am stupid” “arrogance, flippancy, and being condescending... all of the above actually happened hence I never returned to that veterinary practice!”
  - rushing through consults and becoming impatient as a major reason for not returning (e.g. “being obviously too rushed, not giving sufficient time to us” “being treated like a number”)
  - rough or lacking empathy for the pet (e.g. “if they were rough, insensitive, if my pet was terrified in the vets presence... I would probably look elsewhere!”
  - not using layman’s terms, poor listening and lack of options given to clients when decision-making

Tables of data

Graphs of data

Charts of data

Author details

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relationships between pet attachment and client perceptions and expectations of communication within the context of a clinical consultation

Consultation I would like the veterinarian to...