Initial approach to a dental case

Andrew Perry

This presentation is for the general clinician, registered veterinary nurses and clinic directors who wish to explore the author's approach to the first-opinion 'dental' case and how this can be implemented to maximize benefits for patients, clinicians and practices.

The term 'dental' is a poor description for the range of pathologies and treatment options available to our patients. Patients are never admitted for an 'orthopaedic'! The term is both demeaning to the technical complexity and skill required to perform the procedure and does not adequately inform the owner of the procedure anticipated. Informed clinical consent must be discussed for it to have any value, and obtaining such consent is our professional obligation. The author believes that appropriate education of owners increases trust in the clinician, the understanding of the value of the treatment proposed and decreases the risk of complaints.

The aviation industry has long utilized checklists to manage complex processes where standardization and safety are paramount. Checklists can play a hugely valuable role in implementation of practice-wide standards and driving best practice decision making. The presentation will discuss recent checklist systems developed by the author and the Linnaeus Group which aid initial identification of pathology, encourage good communication and eventually aid clinical decision making, both in a consultation and during treatment.

'Dental' disease was recently reported as one of the greatest welfare concerns for the companion animal and numerous investigations have reported high prevalence of oral pathologies in the companion animal population. Signalment and history can provide a wealth of information that can guide the clinician's index of suspicion, and specific instances will be discussed in the presentation.

The author's approach to conscious examinations and subsequent communication with a patient's owner will be explored in addition to the approach to the anaesthetized examination. A review of dental charting, including its benefits, and 'what to record' will be undertaken.

Commonly, owners are not aware of oral pathologies and may not necessarily appreciate the impact these insidious diseases can have on their pets. The use of dental radiographs and intraoral photographs have huge benefit to the clinician but can also be utilized to inform owners what pathology was present and what treatments have been performed, increasing owner's appreciation of the benefits to their pet. A review of oral photography and a brief discussion of dental radiography will be undertaken.

KEY LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Appreciate the benefits of a standardized approach to evaluation and recording of oral pathologies
- Understand how signalment, history and conscious examination should prompt communication with clients and management of their expectations
- Proper performance of oral examination under anaesthesia, including radiography and photography to identify pathology appropriately

MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. Which dog breed type is over-represented in development of periodontitis?
(A) Non-sporting
(B) Working
(C) Toy
(D) Herding
2. In the cat, which teeth most commonly develop tooth resorption first in predisposed patients?
(A) Maxillary third incisor and maxillary canine
(B) Maxillary third premolar and mandibular fourth premolar
(C) Maxillary fourth premolar and mandibular canine
(D) Mandibular third premolar and mandibular molar
3. What is the normal gingival sulcal depth in the cat?
(A) 0–0.5 mm
(B) 0.5–1 mm
(C) 1–2 mm
(D) 1–3 mm