

## **A K. I. S. S. APPROACH TO LOW-STRESS AND ANXIETY**

### **PATIENT HANDLING FOR ANY HOSPITAL –**

#### **PARTS 1 AND 2**

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Changing demographics of pet ownership and strengthening of the human-animal bond are increasingly accentuating the need for kind and gentle approaches to pets' visits to veterinary clinics. This presentation will focus on simple, real world strategies that can be employed, often at low or no cost and in any animal care or health facility, to help reduce fear, anxiety, and stress in our animal patients. Such techniques can dramatically help improve bonding with clients while uniquely distinguishing your hospital. Remember the old adage "no one cares how much you know until they know how much you care." Be prepared--this program may challenge and change the way we think as well as our approach to a dog or cat's typical clinic visit. Can we as vets afford to implement low stress protocols in our hospitals? This presentation argues that we can't afford not to! After all, the pet-owning public is watching.

An additional benefit to adopting fear reducing, low stress techniques and tools is very likely to be found in substantially reduced stress for the human team. In this fast-paced world and with our increasing awareness of professional burnout, emotional exhaustion, and compassion fatigue, surely this is not a bad thing.

No discussion of FAS (fear, anxiety, stress) is complete without some coverage of the pathophysiology which underlies these powerful emotions. How does FAS occur? Why? When?

In what kind of animal care or animal health facility do you work? Do you and your team currently utilize or make attempts to utilize any special tricks or techniques to decrease FAS in your patients?

One way to look at this opportunity is to break a pet (and their owner's) visit to our facility down into its different stages. Such staging includes:

Preparing for the visit to clinic

Making the trip to the clinic

Arrival and check-in at the clinic

The actual visit - Perhaps a wellness/vaccination appointment or minor medical issue to be addressed

Discharge / ending the visit

Returning home

At each and every one of these stages there are things that can be done – actually, arguably, that SHOULD be done – to help minimize or mitigate the pet’s FAS. Approaching this as a knowledgeable animal health professional, what ideas can you come up with? Where do you see opportunity to proactively, preemptively intervene to prevent, or at least reduce, FAS in this animal?

Are there handling techniques you would suggest? How about various medications or even supplements that might help? Or perhaps you can think of some other products that can be used or leveraged to help.

As we discuss these ideas and the possibility of trying them out at work tomorrow, let’s also think about what it will take to incorporate them into our lives and jobs as new normal routines and protocols. Is this possible? Is it worthwhile?

For those who aspire to the highest levels of low stress, low anxiety pet care for themselves or their hospital or other facility, the Fear Free Pets program and Low Stress Handling University are both wonderful options to explore and begin pursuing!

<https://fearfreepets.com/>

<https://lowstresshandling.com/>

It is important to understand that the demographics and philosophies of pet ownership and even agricultural use and husbandry of animals are changing. Think about what many pet owners want for their pets and their relationship with them. How do we as animal health experts help honor, facilitate, and deliver that level of service, compassion, bonding, and care?

If nothing else, this program will make you think closely about your work, your approach, and the direction you want your professional life caring for animals, including your own pets and fellow human beings, to go. Not everyone is up to the challenge of embracing a kinder and gentler low stress, fear- and anxiety-reducing philosophy. Are you?