

VETERINARY
communication
SKILLS

Welcome to the Communication Skills training

We have put together these training notes to help you with selecting the most appropriate video clip to use. Our evaluations are based on the Guide to the Veterinary Consultation based on the Calgary Cambridge model (Radford et al, 2006) and its associated skills. In both consultations, version 1 is the “good” version showing many of the skills listed in the Calgary Cambridge Observation Guide, and version 2 has room for improvement!

Scenario 1 – cow with mastitis

Preparation

The vet reads through her notes before getting out of the car. She is obviously checking some details, perhaps from previous visits to this cow. She changes into clean overalls and boots. She collects the equipment she thinks she will need from the back of the car.

Initiation/setting the agenda

She enters the barn with a smile and greets the farmer with a handshake. She introduces herself and her role as the new vet at the practice. She already knows the farmer's name. There is a bit of chit-chat about finding the place without any problems, then the vet explains why Mr Moore, her boss, couldn't attend himself. She also confirms that she has talked to her boss about the cow, and has checked her notes.

Discussion point – how important is it to let the client know that you have read up on their history?

She asks a nice open question about how the cow is this morning, then listens to the answer. She then sets the agenda for the visit, explaining that she will ask some questions first, then examine the cow, then discuss findings and options. She checks that the farmer is comfortable with this plan.

Gathering information

The vet starts to gather information by asking an open question, listening carefully to the answer, (there is a bit of a joke about the mastitis tubes' names) and empathises with the farmer, saying it must be worrying for him.

Discussion point – what effect will this “joke” and the empathic statement have on the farmer?

She then asks the farmer's views on what he sees happening with this cow.

Discussion point – is it a good idea to ask the client's opinion?

The vet reinforces the agenda, stating that she would like to ask some more detailed questions before examining the cow. She asks about the cow, finding out that the farmer is fond of her, and that she has been a good milk producer and has also produced good heifer calves. The vet uses information gleaned from her boss to ask questions about AI. Asking about the milking routine leads to the farmer having another joke with the vet. A detailed explanation of the milking routine allows the vet to praise the farmer for his good hygiene. The vet does not summarise the information to the farmer.

Discussion point – what effect would a summary have had here?

Physical examination

The vet explains the order in which she will conduct the examination, leaving the udder till last. She asks about the cow's temperament, getting the extra information that this cow is the farmer's wife's favourite. She clearly signposts when she is about to auscultate the chest and abdomen, preventing conversation. She feeds back findings from one side before starting on the other. She explains that the temperature is normal, then dons gloves to examine the udder. She then reiterates the agenda for the next part of the consultation, and cleans her hands.

Agenda setting

The vet asks the farmer to put the cow back with her companions, and then they will chat about the findings and the options. The farmer offers her a cup of tea.

Explanation and planning

The vet starts by explaining her findings, then discusses the bacterium cultured from the milk sample. She uses clear language, explaining any scientific terms. She offers two options, the first being to dry off the affected quarter, but she gives the disadvantages of doing this. She then empathises with the farmer regarding the second option of culling. She emphasises the benefits of having the "fertility package" with the practice, as they can monitor the situation for him. She does not pressure the farmer for a decision, saying he can weigh up the financial aspects and take his time, but it sounds like the farmer has decided to cull the cow.

Discussion point – whose decision is it? Should the vet try to influence the farmer's decision?

Closing

She asks if he has anything else for her to have a look at, and if he has any questions, but he does not. The farmer thanks her and says the kettle will be ready so they can go and have a cup of tea. They exit chatting about the weather.

Scenario 2 – cow with mastitis

Preparation

The vet is obviously in a bit of a bad mood to start with, and checking her phone has not improved this. She changes into muddy boots. She selects a few bits of equipment that she might need and heads to the barn.

Initiation/setting the agenda

She asks the farmer if he is Mr Baxter, and shakes his hand. Although the farmer introduces himself with his first name too, the vet does not introduce herself, and when the farmer asks if he spoke to her on the phone she says she can't remember. Her response to the farmer's query about finding the farm is to say that "with her satnav, she never gets lost".

Discussion point – what effect does missing the opportunity for a bit of chitchat have on the subsequent consultation?

The farmer indicates the cow she's come to see, and the vet instantly refers to culling her (using the term, "ready for the knacker"). She checks that she hasn't got any better despite treatment, and the farmer says he'd like her to have a look at her. She then asks where the cow is, and the farmer says "she's over there, like I told you".

Gathering information

The vet does explain what she will do, but also asks the farmer to "stand there"! She turns to the cow with her stethoscope in her ears, and asks the farmer what has been going on. She tries to maintain eye contact initially, but it's difficult, and she has to remove the stethoscope from one ear to hear his answers properly. When asking about the milking routine, she suggests that bad hygiene has caused the problem. She interrupts the farmer's description of his routine to ask closed questions and leans on the cow when she's finished her examination. She asks the farmer if there's "any chance of a cuppa?"; the farmer looks surprised at this, but agrees. She tells him to get the kettle on, then they can chat while they are waiting.

Explanation and planning

She starts by giving the name of the bacterium that they have cultured, and asks if the farmer has heard of it. He gets this confused with somatic cell count, and instead of explaining, she dismisses his effort. She then briefly mentions drying off the quarter, but says the only option is to cull her. The farmer says he did think that was likely, but seems disappointed that she has made the decision. After assuming that there's nothing else to see, she asks about the cup of tea (the farmer is still thinking about the decision) and they go off in silence.