

Building Bridges

Mastering Communication in
Veterinary Practice



Why Does Communication Matter?

- Impacts care outcomes
- Drives client trust
- Affects staff burnout
- Reduces conflict





Communication is a Clinical Skill

- Not intuitive
- Affected by stress
- Requires structure
- Improves with training



Common Communication Breakdowns

- Information overload
- Medical jargon
- Emotional mismatch
- Assumed understanding

Stress and the Brain

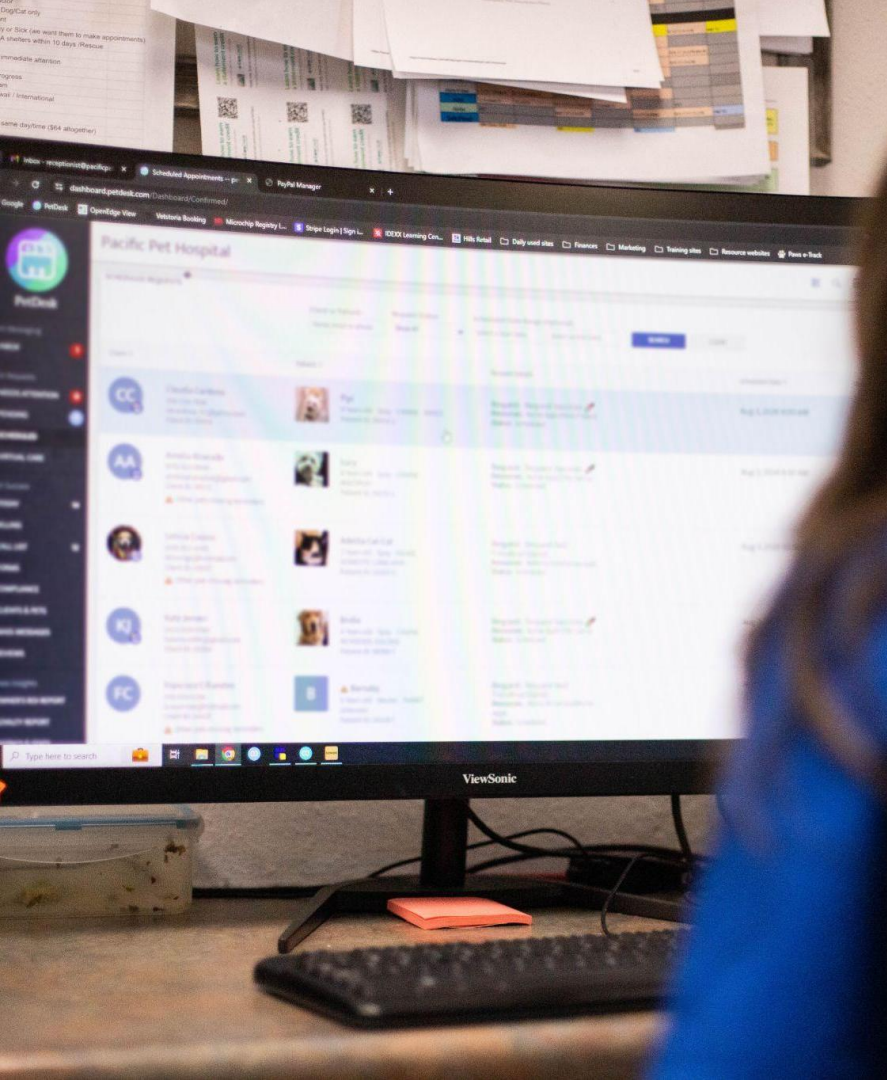
- Stress reduces recall
- Emotion blocks logic
- Processing capacity drops





Structured Communication Models

- Teach-Back
- Chunk & Check
- SBAR
- SPIKES

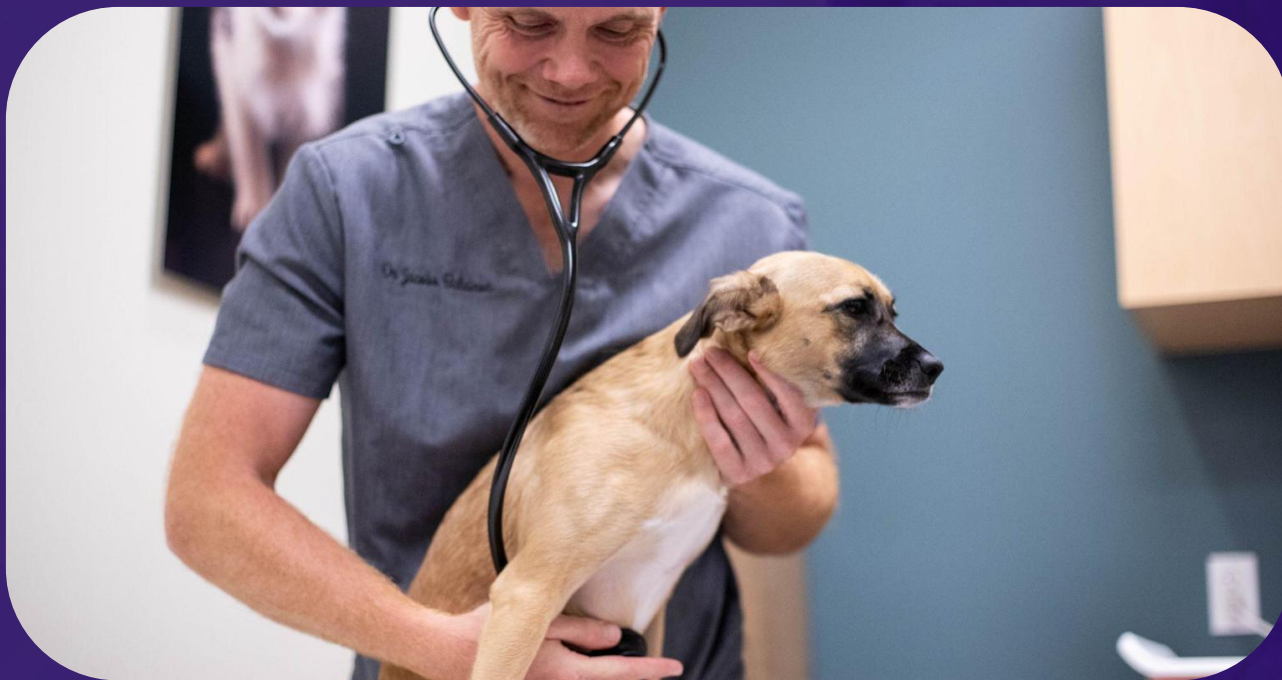


Teach Back

- Client explains back
- Confirms understanding
- Identifies gaps

Scenario: Noodle, 7-yr-old cat, post-dental extraction. Owner needs: oral pain meds 2x daily, soft food only for 5 days, watch for swelling or bleeding. Write the exact words you would use to open a teach-back before they leave.

Teach Back: Apply It!





Chunk and Check

- Small information units
- Intentional pauses
- Understanding checks





Chunk and Check: Apply It!

Scenario: Biscuit, 9-yr-old Beagle, new diabetes diagnosis. Overwhelmed owner. With a partner: deliver Chunk 1 only (what diabetes is), then write the exact check question you'd ask before moving on.

What would be your first chunk?

The SBAR Method



Situation



Background



Assessment



Recommendation



SBAR: Apply It!

CLINICAL SCENARIO

- Patient: **4-year-old female spayed mixed-breed dog**
- Procedure: **Ovariohysterectomy (spay)**
- Time since surgery: **~1 hour post-op**
- Anesthetic recovery initially uneventful

CHANGE IN STATUS

- Gum color: **pale pink → white**
- Heart rate: **increasing**
- Abdomen: **tense and painful**
- Incision site: **no external bleeding**
- Mentation: **weak, quiet**



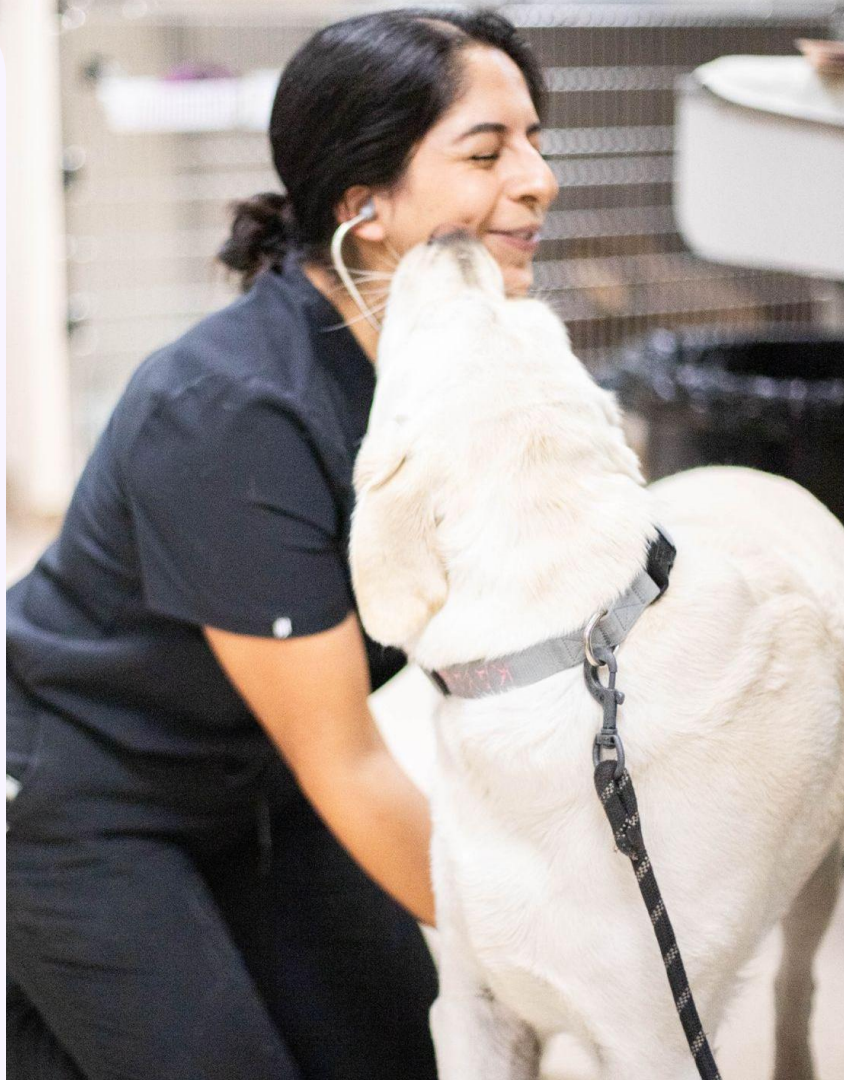


SPIKES

- Setting
- Perception
- Invitation
- Knowledge
- Empathy
- Strategy

SPIKES: Apply It!

- Patient: **9-year-old Golden Retriever**
- Presenting issue: **Acute collapse**
- Diagnostics: **Abdominal ultrasound**
- Findings: **Large splenic mass with free abdominal fluid**
- Concern: **Suspected hemangiosarcoma**
- Owner: **Visibly anxious, asking, 'Is my dog going to die?'**



Empathy is a Skill



1

Recognize emotion

2

Name it

3

Validate it



Shorts



Client-Centered vs Directive

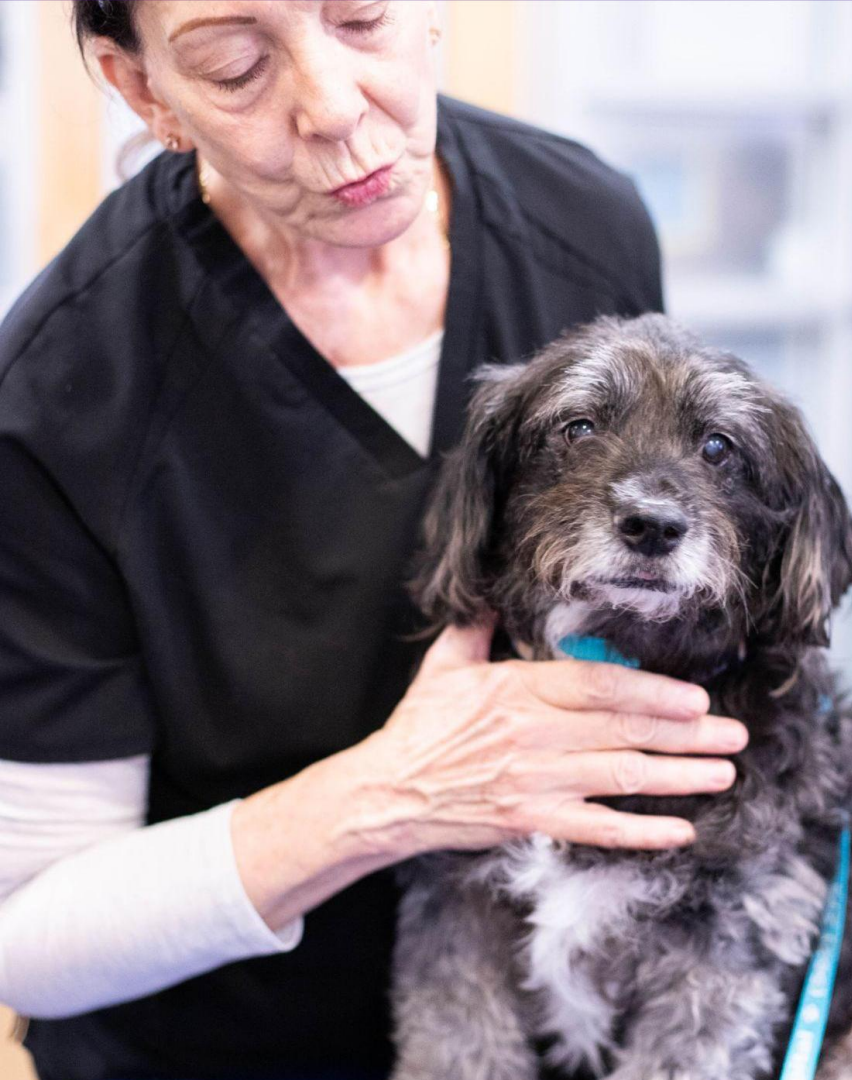
- Directive: telling
- Client-centered: partnering
- Reveals barriers



Team Communication

- Shared expectations
- Structured hand-offs
- Brief huddles





Managing Emotionally Charged Situations

- Validate emotion first
- Slow the interaction
- Redirect to options



Nonverbal Communication

- Body positioning
- Tone and pacing
- Strategic silence



Consistency Builds Trust

- Unified messaging
- Clear expectations
- Predictable messaging



Putting It All Together

Patient: 10-year-old male neutered
Labrador Retriever

Presenting complaint: Lethargy, pale gums,
distended abdomen

Diagnostics: Ultrasound shows large splenic
mass with free abdominal fluid

Concern: Suspected hemangiosarcoma

Owner: Emotional, asking rapid questions,
visibly distressed



Key Takeaways

- Communication is clinical
- Structure reduces stress
- Empathy improves outcomes

Q&

A