



This video is going to take you through a typical physical exam – something that we do over and over again. Its purpose is not to show you how to do a physical exam; you already know how to do that. What it does demonstrate is how to communicate the value and benefit of preventive healthcare and build stronger relationships with your clients.

Why are we doing this? Well, the statistics speak for themselves. Only 57%¹ of pet owners believe that their veterinarian communicates in a manner that they understand. Only 44%¹ of pet owners agree that their veterinarian clearly explained when their pet should be seen again. And surprisingly, many pet owners actually leave appointments without even realizing a physical exam has taken place.

Let's think about this. For example, when you do a pain assessment, you probably palpate and manipulate the joints and ask the owner questions about activity level. But do you explain what you're doing and why? If not, it's unlikely your client would even know that you're doing a pain assessment. Today, we will demonstrate some simple communication techniques that will help convey the value you bring to every physical exam that you do.

1. Bayer HealthCare LLC, Animal Health Division, Bayer Veterinary Care Usage Study

■ Veterinarian ■ Client

Great, Mr. Smith. Now that we have finished Floyd's medical history and behavioral assessment, let's move on to his physical exam. If you have questions at any point, please don't hesitate to ask.

Okay.

I'm just going to have my technician, Caitlin, come in and help us hold Floyd.

So, we're going to give Floyd a thorough physical exam from head to tail. We're going to check his teeth and body condition as we go. Do you have any concerns with Floyd that we should look at?

No, I don't think so.

COMMUNICATION TECHNIQUES

- Address the client and pet by name
- Clearly verbalize physical exam is beginning

- Explore for additional client concerns
- Maintain good eye contact throughout

■ Veterinarian ■ Client

I'm going to start by looking in Floyd's eyes. Things look normal.

Okay.

Now, let's look in Floyd's ears for signs of irritation or infection. His ear canal looks great – it's very clean, and I can see his eardrum. Every once in a while, you can check his ears to make sure they are clean and pink, like they look here. If you ever notice that there is waxy debris, odor, or redness, that could be a sign of an ear infection, and you should let us know.

Okay.

Now I'm going to look at Floyd's pearly whites. If you look at Floyd's teeth and compare them to this chart, you can see they're in good health, and that's where we want to keep them. Oral health for dogs is very important because it's connected to their overall health.

Okay.

I'm just going to take a minute to listen to Floyd's heart and lungs... his heart sounds normal. As dogs age, they can develop some changes in the heart that can cause problems. That's why it's important that we check his heart at least once a year so that we can detect any problems early and begin to deal with them before they become serious.

Now I am feeling Floyd's lymph nodes... they feel normal. And now I am moving down to his abdomen to check his internal organs.

We want to check Floyd's skin and coat to look for signs of hair loss, infection, fleas and ticks, and any lumps or bumps. Everything looks good.

Great.

Let's check Floyd's body condition by looking at Floyd from above to see if we can see a waist – like this. We also want to be able to feel the top of the spine but not see it. Same for the ribs – we don't want to see them, but we want to feel them. If you touch Floyd here, you can feel his ribs.

COMMUNICATION TECHNIQUES

- Talk through each step of the exam with the client
- Highlight any normal and abnormal findings

- Involve the client
- Use models, pictures, and diagrams to help convey information

- Explain the reason for each assessment
- Stress the value of routine preventive care to the pet's health

- Talk through each step of the exam with the client

- Use collaborative words, such as "let's" and "we"

■ Veterinarian ■ Client

Do you see what I mean?

Yes.

Here you can see that Floyd's body condition score is 3 out of 5. That's in the normal range.

The reason we pay attention to body condition score every year is that weight gain tends to sneak up on us and we don't notice it until it's really obvious.

Oh, I see what you mean.

Next, I am going to do a quick pain assessment. We want to make sure Floyd doesn't feel any pain in his joints or anywhere else.

Okay.

Well, we've finished Floyd's physical exam now! Floyd, you've been such a great patient. Thank you! Mr. Smith, do you have any questions or concerns at this point?

No.

Mr. Smith, you and your family are doing a wonderful job looking after Floyd. He looks great today.

Okay, Floyd, you're all done.

I'd like to see him back again in 12 months for his next physical exam – sooner if you notice any changes or have concerns. It's very important to check him at least once a year at this point – and more often when he gets older.

The physical exam is the best way to detect medical problems early, before they are advanced and harder to treat.

COMMUNICATION TECHNIQUES

- Assess the client's level of understanding before proceeding
- Invite the client to actively participate in the exam when possible
- Use models, pictures, and diagrams to help convey information
- Explain the reason for each assessment
- Talk through each step of the exam with the client
- Address the client and pet by name
- Invite final questions from the client
- Praise the client for the care of the pet
- Summarize findings to ensure understanding
- Advise the client to return with the pet if any changes or concerns
- Reinforce the value of a routine physical exam

Veterinarian Client

Now I'd like to review Floyd's vaccine schedule and discuss what parasite control he needs today. Would that be okay?

Sure.

COMMUNICATION TECHNIQUES

- **Clearly verbalize the transition to the next area for discussion**

Today's pet owner doesn't always see the benefit in a routine checkup. It's important to demonstrate the value we bring to every interaction we have with clients and their pets. The physical exam provides one of the best opportunities to communicate the importance of preventive healthcare and of returning for an exam every year.

The script for this video is available from the Partners for Healthy Pets website and is provided as a guide to help you use Words That Work.