



Ask Maggie Shilcock, practice management expert, to solve your real life client care conundrums – e-mail them to

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# “Your service is a rip off!”

## Dear Maggie,

It was a busy time and the reception area was full. A client approached me at the reception desk saying in rather a loud voice that they had a question to ask.

A hush fell over the waiting room. “I had my dog spayed here last week,” said the client, “and I have just discovered that the veterinary practice two miles away charges £25 less than you do for the same operation. Why are you more expensive?”

A dozen expectant faces looked at me waiting for an answer. What is the best way to handle such questions?

## What you should do

The most important thing you should do is to show the client that your practice gives good value for money. We know that prices vary from practice to practice, and that often they are directly related to running costs. However, this is not the time to try to give a complicated explanation to the client about the cost of managing a veterinary practice.

You need to show the client what they are getting for their money and



maintain their confidence in your service. Agree with the client that the price for neutering does vary from practice to practice, adding that you hope that the cost at your practice reflects the excellent service you provide.

Talk about the standards the practice sets for all its operations and the fact that everything is of the highest quality – the safest anaesthetic, modern equipment, qualified nurses and so on. Remind the client about the pre-operative procedures and care you give and the post-operative support provided, such as follow-up telephone calls, free check-ups and stitch removal.

It is very important to always point out that there are no hidden costs in the price you charge (if that is the case, of course). In some cases, a neighbouring practice may be cheaper, but there will be add-on costs that clients will only



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discover when they come to pay their bill.

Never forget to say that the vets and nurses are always only a telephone call away if any help or advice is needed and end by saying that the practice cares very much about them and their pet, and aims to provide really good value for money.

Never criticise a neighbouring practice, whatever your feelings may be about its prices or service, it's simply unprofessional and a discerning client will not be impressed.

What you say to the client must of course be a true reflection of the practice, so it is important that you have a very good knowledge of the basic treatments and procedures the practice carries out, so that you can talk with confidence and knowledge.

### **What can we learn from this?**

Many clients do now compare prices, and it is often very difficult for them to see why the cost for what they perceive as the same treatment or service is different. This is why we need to spend time explaining just exactly what we do and the good value we give.

Providing both verbal and written information about pre- and post-operative

services and the operation itself, at the time that the operation or treatment is discussed/booked, makes sure the client fully understands everything we are doing and providing.

Do not be afraid to tell the client both verbally and in all your literature what a good service you provide. Most people would rather pay a bit more if they understand that their pets are going to be safer and looked after better.

Personalise your service whenever possible, so any literature about the procedures to be undertaken should include the pet's name and the client's name. Make your client feel that you really care. Doing this should hopefully avoid the situation encountered above; indeed, if clients are discussing prices with friends, they may well become advocates for your practice if they defend a higher price by telling their friends how much more they are getting for their money.

However, nothing is ever foolproof and it is worth remembering that nine times out of 10 it is the receptionist who gets asked the difficult questions; so it is important that all staff working on reception have been trained how to deal with client questions about cost.