Spay/Neuter Training Reference Guide for Medical Support Staff

A resource guide for your on-site ASPCA Spay/Neuter Alliance training program.

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Training Preparation

What to Expect When You Arrive

1. Arrival and tour of our facility
2. Meet and greet with your trainers
3. Your trainers collect some information about you and your team
4. One-on-one training begins:
   • You will have the same trainers through the whole week
   • You will be trained on how we do things at ASPCA Spay/Neuter Alliance
   • We encourage you to try new things and to ask questions

What to Do Before You Arrive for Training

• Read through this guide
• Watch the video links and write down any questions you have

What You Need to Bring to Training

• A notepad to write your thoughts throughout the week
• An open mind
• Lots of questions!
Training Subjects

Intake Process

Improving overall clinic flow begins with the efficient intake of patients. A smooth beginning enhances the productivity throughout the entire patient experience.

• Before intake starts, we make sure suites are set up. This way, we can start surgery immediately after intake is complete.

• One concept we like to share is to have a limited window for intake and release. Here, we have 30 minutes to complete release and 30 minutes to complete intake. Having this limited window gives the surgical team enough time to perform exams on patients, draw drugs and start surgery 1–1.5 hours from the time intake begins.

• During the intake period, the technician looks over the paperwork (including answers to the medical questions) for any issues, then asks the owner if they would like any other services. They then prepare the kennel card and collar (for dogs)/carrier label tape (for cats). If the technician hears of any medical concerns, they are noted on the card. This way, staff members taking the animals through to the medical area are notified.

• Dogs are received from the owner and weighed, then visit the doctor for a medical exam and pre-medicants. We pre-medicate our dogs as they arrive to reduce the amount of handling and to reduce stress on the patient. During this process, the doctor writes all the information from the card onto the log, including any medical issues they find. If a staff member notices any medical issues at the front counter, they will ask the owner to wait until the exam is over. This way, we can send no surgery patients home as soon as possible.

• Once most or all dogs are out of the lobby, staff members begin to take cats back to the cat kennel. We know the identity of each cat because we ask the owner to place the kennel card on their cat’s carrier before they leave.

• As soon as the doctor has completed checking-in dogs, they will begin to check in cats. This is usually performed by one veterinarian and one-to-two staff members. Each cat will be gently removed from their carrier and placed on the scale. The doctor then performs the medical exam and the cat is placed in a cage with their kennel card. During this process, the doctor writes the information from the card onto the log, along with any additional findings from the exam.
Flow & Communication

It is very important to incorporate efficient flow, from the time staff members walk in the door until they leave for the day.

- The first step in getting an efficient flow is to write out a schedule of goals: what time you want to start and finish intake, release and drug drawing?

- Next, write out some time goals: what time you want to start surgery, what time dogs are done; what time should be cat surgery be complete; what is the average number of surgeries that can be completed in one hour; how long does it take to complete post-surgery tasks? This will be a useful guide to help see what you can accomplish in a day.

- During your training, we will mostly be focusing on surgical flow. The key to good surgical flow is having strong communication and defined roles for each person on the surgical team. The surgical team should work as a well-oiled team. We have found that having a team of one veterinarian, one veterinary technician (team leader), and two veterinary assistants works best.

- Finding the right balance of patient anesthetic safety and doctor efficiency takes practice. While monitoring all patients under anesthesia every two minutes, aim to also:
  - Always having the next patient ready for the doctor—so all they need to do is change their gloves and move on to the next patient—with no more than a four-minute wait;
  - Place the next patient under anesthesia for the shortest time possible.

To achieve this, the team needs to use closed loop communication, loud enough so the whole team can hear, and always be three steps ahead. If you are not moving, there is probably something you should be doing.

- Closed loop communication is accomplished by always responding when one of your fellow team members speak. This will give the team confidence that they have been heard, and are therefore never guessing if they have been heard.

- Another way to get strong communication is to have signs available for patients, such as “Caution,” “Remove My Rice Bag,” “Watch Me Closely,” etc., as well as pre-printed handouts to add to release paperwork.
RVTs & Veterinary Technician Roles

Our veterinary technicians are responsible for close communication with the veterinarian regarding patients, drawing drugs, completing paperwork, leading the surgical flow, making sure they and their team are monitoring the patients every two minutes, making medications and speaking with clients.

Our recommendation is for the veterinary technician to be the leader of flow, instead of the veterinarian, as this will allow the doctor to focus on surgery and their patients, without being distracted by flow.

It is much easier for the veterinary technician to focus on flow, due to them being able to see all the factors that play with flow, such as:

- Assistant preparation speed
- Table and recovery mat space
- If the next patient is a caution animal
- If the preparation for the next patient will take longer than normal

Veterinary Assistant Roles

Our veterinary assistants are responsible for many tasks throughout the day, including: checking in patients during intake; reading canine and feline body language; close communication with the veterinary technician and veterinarian regarding patients; prepping all patients for the day; making sure all patients under anesthesia are being monitored every two minutes; walking through kennels on a regular basis to check on recovering patients; moving patients through the surgery suite; setting up the suite; and completing end-of-day duties.
Patient Care, Monitoring & Parameters

Patient care should always be of the highest quality.

- **Hypothermia prevention**: This should start from the time a patient is transferred to us until they are returned to their owner.

- **Proper anesthetic monitoring**: Patients should be monitored regularly while under anesthesia. This involves looking at the whole patient and checking their heart rate, respiratory rate, gum color, palpebral response, eye position and jaw tone. The team should monitor all patients under anesthesia every two minutes, which we refer to as a two-minute loop.

- **Patient comfort**: We use a series of measures to make sure our patients are comfortable, such as using multimodal pain medications and rice bags, extubating early and reducing noise and light levels in rooms.

Release

**The key to having a good release process** is to be efficient, organized and exhibit good communication. You will be shown our paperwork process, client flow and will witness some client interactions.
Disease Control

It is very important to be aware of your surroundings and prevent cross-contamination as much as possible. Some of the ways you can achieve this are:

- Using towels with your patients (comfort for the patient and a barrier between you and them)
- Making hand sanitizer easily accessible to staff
- Disinfecting surfaces between patients
- Preventing patients from directly touching the recovery mat

Also, knowledge of your detergent and disinfection products is key. Ask yourself these questions:

- What diseases do your products cover;
- How should your products be mixed;
- How long do your products last once they are mixed;
- What is the contact time of your products?

Gentle Animal Handling

Helping patients have a good experience at your clinic will help them have good experiences in future veterinary appointments, which is one of the reasons that we teach gentle animal handling techniques.

Some techniques we can utilize to reduce patient stress are:

- Using towels and blankets when handling dogs and cats
- Moving slow when a patient is showing signs of stress
- Using a separate entrance for fearful dogs
- Using towels and C-holds instead of scruffing cats
- Using peanut butter and squeeze cheese to distract canine patients during exams, injections and restraint, if needed
Frequently Asked Questions

Can I take pictures/video of procedures, equipment, setup, etc.?

To protect our patients, we prefer you to NOT take pictures while in the surgical area. If there is a specific piece of equipment you would like a photo of, we may have it already available to view in our Tips & Tools for an Efficient Spay/Neuter Clinic Booklet on ASPCApro.org. If not, we’d be happy to take a photo for you.