

# 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 videos at [ASPCApr.org/spayneuterlibrary](https://aspcapro.org/spayneuterlibrary) and write down any questions you have

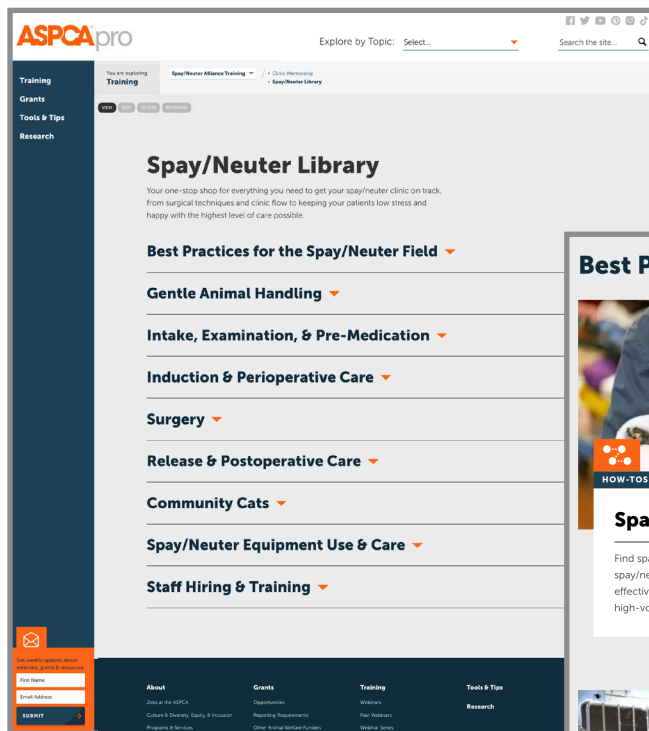
## What You Need to Bring to Training

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



# Resources on ASPCApro

All of our in-depth training resources can be found on our free-access website at [aspcapro.org/spayneuterlibrary](https://aspcapro.org/spayneuterlibrary) and are broken out into the following categories.



The “**Best Practices for the Spay/Neuter Field**” section covers larger concepts used within the field, such as pharmacology, disease prevention, efficient flow, ergonomics, and emergency preparedness.

## Best Practices for the Spay/Neuter Field

**HOW-TO'S**

### Spay/Neuter Guidelines

Find spay/neuter guidelines, tips for application of spay/neuter tattoos, and research articles to maintain effective and humane practices at your high-quality, high-volume spay/neuter clinic.

**JOB AID DOWNLOADS**

### Pharmacology for Spay/Neuter Clinics

These drug protocols and guidelines will aid licensed technicians and veterinarians at HQHVN clinics in determining proper delivery, ordering, storage, and handling of controlled substances.

**HOW-TO'S**

### Disease Prevention at Spay/Neuter Clinics

These videos show techniques to keep animals healthy in a spay/neuter facility, including pre-admission screening, animal handling, and equipment and kennel cleaning.

**HOW-TO'S**

### Efficient Flow at Spay/Neuter Clinics

This how-to video illustrates proper medical flow at a spay/neuter clinic.

**HOW-TO'S**

### Spay/Neuter Ergonomics for Staff Safety

Resources to improve surgical staff ergonomics and safety while working at a spay/neuter clinic.

**JOB AID DOWNLOADS**

### Preparedness for Spay/Neuter Emergencies

This material covers implementing a CPR protocol for your spay/neuter clinic, as well as a free step-by-step guide to use in case of emergency hemoabdomen.

# Medical Support Staff Roles

## 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.



# Training Subjects

## Intake, Examination, & Pre-Medication

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

- We have implemented paper-light curbside intake and release for public appointments. This includes online scheduling, e-payments (no cash or checks), and e-signing for surgery consent forms. This process reduces stress for both owners and animals. It also aids in more efficient data management before, during, and after the appointment using an online database, Clinic HQ (CHQ).
- 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.
- Kennel cards, paper collars, and kennel label tape (for cats) are prepared ahead of time.
- During the intake period, clients and their pet(s) stay in vehicles and alert us of their arrival via text message. A queue is written on the lobby whiteboard, which is used to track all steps of the intake process: the client's arrival; staff speaking with the owner car-side; when the patient is ready to enter the building; and when the patient has been brought inside.
- While outside with the owner, staff confirm requested services, review medical history, and answer any medical questions. Any updated information is then entered into CHQ and/or written on the kennel card.
- For **dogs**, a collar is handed to the owner to apply while still in their vehicle. Owners usually do not enter the building unless their dog is fractious. We may need them to help assist with handling as well as making the dog more comfortable for examination. In these instances, we will also ask the owner to wait until all other pets have come inside, bringing them in last once the lobby has cleared.
- Once inside, dogs are weighed, examined by a doctor, and given calming drugs. We pre-medicate dogs as they arrive, to reduce the amount of handling and reduce patient stress.
- For **cats**, kennel label tape is placed on the carrier or trap before they come inside.
- Once inside, each (non-community) cat will be gently removed from their carrier and placed on the scale. The doctor then performs the medical exam and gives them gabapentin to reduce their stress. Cats are then placed in a kennel with their kennel card.
- If a staff member notices any medical issues during intake, 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.

## Perioperative Care

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 & Postoperative Care

**The key to having a good release process** is to be efficient, organized, and exhibit good communication. You will be shown our curbside release (similar to curbside intake) and will witness some client interactions.

## Efficient Flow at Spay/Neuter Clinics

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 should be done; what time should 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.



## Disease Prevention at Spay/Neuter Clinics

**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 one of our *Tips & Tools* booklets at [ASPCApro.org/spayneuterlibrary](https://aspcapro.org/spayneuterlibrary). If not, we'd be happy to take a photo for you.

