Nipping it in the bud – Preventing future behaviour problems in puppies

**Summary**

In this webinar Sarah Heath discusses the importance of preventative behavioural medicine in puppies and kittens in order to improve the welfare of animals, strengthen the owner-pet bond and minimise the stress for patients when coming in to the veterinary practice.

She highlights the importance of the veterinary profession giving honest guidance even before the owner has purchased or rescued their new pet to help the owner find a pet that is suitable for their way of life and that they are able to care for.

Sarah also discusses methods practices can use to educate their owners without taking up consultation time, for example puppy parties, problem prevention courses and kitten information evenings. She talks about the advantages and limitations of each method and gives some useful advice about factors to consider when introducing them in general practice.

Next Sarah talks about the fundamental messages we want to impart to new pet owners: advising on appropriate socialisation and habituation, teaching body language signalling, making sure that the owners are not sucked in to the dominance myth and discussing the principles of self-confidence, expectation and compliance. She discusses at the negative effects overtraining can have and the importance of appropriate handling and social interaction.

Finally, Sarah considers the need to have a preventative behavioural medicine perspective when considering the timing of castration in male dogs, what advice we need to be giving to cat owners about resource sharing, and the importance of minimal restraint handling in kittens and also puppies, both in the practice and by the owner at home.

**Key** **points**

* It is important to give owners advice on preventative behavioural medicine early in their relationship with their pet. Ideally a discussion on pet selection with owners before they obtain their new animal to prevent a pet-owner mismatch.
* In order to successfully socialise and habituate puppies and kittens they must be in a positive emotional state at the times of exposure.
* Owners need to understand body language signalling so they can interpret the emotional state of their animal.
* The dominance myth and suppressive training techniques are harmful to animal welfare, it is important to explain this to owners and encourage techniques based around emotional stability.
* Emotional stability can be achieved through self-confidence, realistic expectations and compliance, all of which should be taught in a positive manner.
* It is important to encourage appropriate handling and social interaction, what an owner perceives to be a positive action may be negative to the pet. It is important that social interactions respect normal canine behaviour to prevent emotional conflict.

**Keywords**

* Socialisation
* Habituation
* Compliance
* Self-confidence
* Expectation
* Positive emotional state
* Body language signalling
* Minimal handling restraint
* Puppy parties
* Kitten information evenings
* Behaviour problems

**Transcript**

Thank you very much indeed Anthony. Good evening everybody. Thank you also to Pedigree and to Webinar Vet for organising it, Pedigree for sponsoring it. It’s great to be able to talk to so many people from your own room, the technology is all a little bit beyond me but thankfully Anthony is very good at that sort of thing so thank you very much. We are going to be talking tonight about nipping it in the bud, and talking about both puppies and kittens in terms of preventative behavioural medicine.

I want to start off by just thinking a little bit about behaviour in a veterinary context and certainly it is relatively new compared with some of the disciplines we are more familiar with like neurology and cardiology etc., behavioural medicine is something that has been considered to be quite a new kid on the block. But it affects both vets and nurses on a daily basis, and I am assuming we’ve got a mixed audience tonight, but everyone working within the veterinary profession is actually exposed to behavioural medicine on a daily basis and is sometimes unwittingly engaging in giving advice that is related to behavioural medicine. Preventing behavioural problems is something that is not only going to be beneficial for our patients and obviously the welfare of our animals should be our prime concern but also for owners, we know that many owners have detrimental effects on their relationship with their beloved pet because of behavioural issues. And then veterinary staff, some of us working within the veterinary profession may have a decrease in our job satisfaction, increase in job related stress, related to behavioural problems in the patients that we care for. So this is something that is crucially important in a veterinary context.

There are two main aims of a preventative behavioural service. The first is to think about the owner and the pet, so we’re wanting to maximise the benefits of that relationship as seen here with the little boy and the dog. We want to have a situation where the owner is getting the maximum enjoyment out of that relationship in order to have an owner who is committed, that owner who is committed will also be more committed usually to the veterinary practice that they attend as well, so the more we improve the relationship between the owner and the pet, often the more we bond the owner also to our practices. And then the other part of it is looking very much at our involvement in the behavioural health of our patients and minimising the stress for patients when they’re coming to the veterinary practice. We know from various surveys, particularly the Bayer one that looked at the impact of stress on cat owners attendance at veterinary practices, we know that owners, of cats particularly but also of dogs, do avoid coming to veterinary practices because of the fact that they are apprehensive about the behaviour of their pet in that context and they find it all too stressful. With cats that accentuates the problem of the fact that cats obviously do mask the outwards signs of disease until relatively late in the disease process, so if you combine that fact with owners being reluctant to come to the practice, we are often sadly faced with cats coming in fairly late on in the development of a disease process because of the fact that there is a behavioural obstacle if you like to coming to the practice early.

So if we want to maximise this pet owner relationship to start with, we need to think about trying to get the best out of that relationship even before the owner actually brings the pet home. And ideally, in an ideal world, and this has been better achieved in the States than it has been thus far in the UK, we would like the veterinary profession to be involved more in pet selection. Certainly in terms of finding both a species and a breed that suits the demands of that particular family and its lifestyle, and many owners will find that difficult to do, to choose the right pet without some degree of guidance and we as a veterinary profession are in an ideal position to give advice on the matching of a breed and a species in certain situations with a lifestyle. And I know that many of us in general practice situations will find ourselves questioning that selection on an almost daily basis, as the owner walks in to the waiting room with their pet and your heart sinks and you think why oh why, and if only we could have got in to that situation before that selection was made we could have made things so much better for both the owner and the pet.

And the more honest we are with the guidance that we give, the better that’s going to be for the pet and the owner. It may not be what the owner wants to hear in the short term and indeed we may find that our advice is not followed, and I am sure that many of us can think of examples of that, where we give advice and yet they still walk in the next day with a species or a breed that we would not have considered suitable. But if we can get access to owners in that decision making process I think that the veterinary profession has a lot to offer. Even if we don’t get in at that stage, if we get in at the stage where they have decided on what species or breed that they are going to have, we can give advice about finding a suitable rearing environment. And the most important thing about selecting a suitable rearing environment is that it closely matches their ultimate home environment. This is really important when it comes to the learning processes early in life of socialisation and habituation and in increasing or maximising the emotional capacity of an individual. The more closely its rearing environment matches its ultimate home environment, the larger the emotional capacity that individual is going to have going through life, and that is going to be beneficial for preventing those behavioural problems that are so common. So, we do want to be able to talk to people before they have picked the animal up, the earlier we can get in to that discussion with prospective owners the better. Now what you are probably think is but people don’t even come in to the practice before they have get an animal, they get the animal and then come into the practice and this is where the technology that we are now having, the social media that we now have, the websites etc., that’s where they are really useful because owners will often shop around on the internet and on social media for veterinary practices before they get their pet, so when they are thinking about getting a pet they will often have a look at the websites or social media sites of local veterinary practices, so this is a time where we can get some access to owners who have not yet made that purchase, so it is a thing to think about using that sort of technology in reaching the clients that don’t yet have a pet.

Once you have got a pet, remember, the process of that acquisition of the pet is a very emotional one. So owners are not typically going to base their decision making on sound, logical argument, it is going to have an emotional component. A lot of people for example are going to just want to replace the dog or cat that has just passed on, they are going to go for the breed that they have traditionally had, whilst maybe forgetting that they have aged maybe 14 or 15 years since they last had a member of that particular breed. I am thinking of clients that I have had not that long ago, a lady of 75, so she was 60 when she got her previous large boisterous breed, now at the age of 75 it really wasn’t a good idea. Or, and we have ones with slightly shorter lifespans, obviously the really large breeds with shorter lifespans of 7 years, but 7 years can again make quite a difference, if the owner is now 77 instead of 70, that could be quite a major difference in their ability to look after a dog of considerable size, so it is important to offer realistic advice as we have just said, but also compassionate advice so that we exercise our duty of care. We have a duty of care for any patient obviously who is already on our books, but I think that as a veterinary profession we have a duty of care to all animals and therefore we should also be thinking about those who are not yet on our books.

So what about those new owners when they have got their pet. So we have lost potentially the opportunity to advise about pet selection, and of course that does limit our ability to reduce the risk of behavioural issues because we may have some mismatches that are going to create emotional tension, that are going to create emotional challenges for the pet and probably for the owner as well. But even so there is still a great deal of scope for education, and this is where veterinary practices do really need to be thinking about incorporating preventative behavioural medicine in to that process of contact with the new puppy and the new kitten. We’re all very familiar with the health process, so that first vaccination appointment or maybe that post purchase health check that some owners thankfully do actually engage in and do contact the practice for, often it is the first vaccination though before we actually meet them. The post purchase health check though is an interesting visit because already by this point the owner may have quite a strong emotional attachment to that new puppy or new kitten. It may be that they have only had the animal with them for the two and a half hour drive back from the breeder and they may have come to the veterinary practice on the way home, but don’t underestimate how much the emotional attachment will have already formed in that time. And you all know that giving health advice in that post purchase health check can be frustrating, so I am sure we have all come across cases where we have detected a fairly serious health issue in that first check post purchase and still the owner is not going to take that puppy or kitten back to the breeder, so don’t underestimate the strength of the relationship very early on.

So the subject of preventative behavioural medicine can be raised in a consultation, but remember that in general veterinary practice we are often very time pressured, so in a first or second vaccination appointment there is so much information that you are wanting to impart, you are also needing to give a full health check, you are also needing to give the vaccination itself so it may be sensible to think about ways that your practice can give more devoted time to preventative behavioural advice. And the potential ways to give advice include the following which you can see here, some of them may be more familiar to you than others, puppy parties or classes are fairly common now, certainly in the UK in general veterinary practices. Kitten information evenings or kitten kindy may be slightly less common, I am going to talk about those in a little bit of detail. My personal preference is very much for a kitten information evening rather than a kitten kindy but as I say, we will talk about that in a moment. So what is a problem prevention course, well a problem prevention courses are different from the puppy party which are traditionally held because problem prevention courses are very much about educating new owners about the emotional health of their pets, very much about teaching emotional control to the puppies and about getting the owners to understand their role in creating emotional stability. So problem prevention courses are slightly more specialised, here in the UK we are about a programme about developing emotional intelligence for puppies which is a problem prevention course which will be run purely in veterinary practices, the people who are eligible to come on that course will be veterinary nurses or veterinary practice staff because we want these courses to be run specifically within a veterinary context because they are not a training class, it is not suitable for them to be them to be done in a training environment because it is about the emotional health of the puppies and problem prevention courses are based on that. If anyone does want any further information on developing emotional intelligence in puppies then you can obtain our email address I am sure from Anthony and from webinar vet. So special nurse appointments, in the UK particularly we have got an increased number of nurses running clinics, having specialised appointments for themselves, so obesity clinics for example, or old age related clinics both in terms of behaviour and health and behavioural consultations can certainly be a very important part of the veterinary nurses program and they are certainly often in a very good position to provide suitable advice, to have that little bit more time as well, to set aside specific appointments so that is definitely something we would encourage practices to have a look into. What about appropriate literature, well the word appropriate is the most important word there, there is a lot of literature available on behaviour, and on puppy rearing and kitten rearing, some of it more suitable than others. So it is really important that if you are going to stock literature or if you are going to put links on your website or you’re going to put promotions on your social media that you are careful about the source of that literature and make sure that it is from a reputable source.

So let’s look at the puppy party, the puppy party as I say is probably the one most people are familiar with. The idea is to definitely promote the prevention of behavioural problems, but a puppy party is more than that, a puppy party is about trying to encourage owners, at the earliest point in their relationship with this new pet, to be responsible pet owners in all that that encompasses, so it is not just about behaviour but also about the whole concept of living with a dog in a family situation and also in a society situation. Also promoting the services that your practice has to offer. So the aim in a puppy party is think in terms of your owners viewing your practice as a health care centre not as somewhere they only come when everything has gone wrong, when they are at the end of their tether, when the animal is really sick, physically usually, but to the as the veterinary practice as the place they go to for advice, on nutrition certainly for nutritional advice and also for advice about the whole relationship. If we can encourage owners to see us in this way, to see us more in an overall sense as the place where they have their health care for their pet, not only in terms of their physical health but also their medical health it will really help to increase the frequency of visits and owners coming to us as the veterinary profession as their source of advice, rather than going elsewhere.

When we are running puppy parties I think that probably the first thing to say to most veterinary practices is don’t run puppy classes just because you think you should. There shouldn’t be a pressure on practices to run puppy parties, and I think in recent times that has been a bit of a problem because there has been this kind of image that you’re not a good practice if you don’t run puppy classes. That’s not true, if your un puppy classes badly then you are actually potentially doing more harm than good so it is really important to make sure that you have the facilities, that is both the physical facilities but also the staff facilities, to make sure that you have the ability to run puppy parties which are beneficial to the puppies that attend them. So don’t fee pressurised to run puppy classes, yes they are a valuable addition to your practice services if they can be run appropriately. Making sure you have a suitable venue is the first thing, and by a suitable venue we mean somewhere that is going to be safe and secure physically, where the pets are safe, where they can’t get outside, they can’t run away, they can’t injure themselves, all those sorts of things. Particularly thinking about flooring as well for puppies, because it is really important that puppies are not twisting and turning on slippery flooring and also talk to owners about that as well with the increase in popularity of flooring that doesn’t involve carpets, so laminate or wooden flooring, or all sorts of variation on what we would have called lino in the good old days. We now have a lot of these soft, smooth, slippery surfaces in domestic homes and that can be a problem, particularly in a young developing puppy and particularly in certain breeds where we really need them to be careful about joint maturation so thinking about a suitable venue is important. Also ensuring that you have the correct number of staff per puppy, puppies need a lot of supervision in the puppy parties, remember that the puppy party environment is about controlled exposure to novelty, it is not ok to invite your owners to the practice and then encourage a free for all where puppies are just running around having a fantastic time, totally out of control. The idea of a puppy party is that you are going to be influencing emotional stability, influencing emotional capacity and what you are trying to do is lead the pet to be a calm and sociable individual, not an individual which sees access to other puppies and access to people as an association with very high emotional arousal even if that arousal is positive we want them to learn to control that emotional state. So we do need to the right number of staff because you need to be able to give one on one attention to any of the puppies who are not coping particularly well and you also need to be having eyes in the back of your head to see what is going on between puppies whilst you are also talking, so you need enough staff.

What about kitten information evenings, well the idea of these is that it is an opportunity to give information to kitten owners without the kittens coming in to the practice. So this isn’t an event for the kittens, it is and event for the owners, so the owners attend without their kittens. The idea is that you impart your knowledge about normal feline behaviour and the specific need to this species. The understanding of normal feline behaviour is very poor within the cat owning population so this something that really does need to be rectified in order to prevent behaviour problems, and remember that there is a very important interplay both in cats and dogs between behavioural or emotional stress and physical disease, through mucous membrane integrity, through the immune system etc.. So this is a veterinary matter and something that we need to be engaged in.

There are such things as kitten classes, sometimes referred to as kitten kindy, these were first of all promoted by a lady called Kirsty Seksel who works in Australia. If you are going to run classes with kittens attending it is important to remember it is not just a puppy class for kittens, it is a very different idea of socialisation for kittens and what we are trying to do in a kitten class is to expose kittens to novelty in a positive state, so to habituate them, but not to engage in active socialisation, remember that the cat is not an obligate social creature so we don’t want to be forcing social contact with other cats or indeed people, it is a far more passive experience, of kittens being in a novel environment whilst in a positive emotional state.

There are some practical considerations because the environment needs to be kitten safe, and I am sure that any of you that have ever owned a kitten, those of you that have vaccinated a kitten know that having a kitten safe environment is easier said than done. So making sure that you have got a place with no nooks and crannies, nowhere they can get stuck, nowhere they can get so up high that you can’t reach them etc. so your selection of environment for kitten kindy can be difficult. Interaction between the kittens is based on passive exposure and probably the most useful thing if you are going to run a kitten kindy is to teach toleration of veterinary examination and to teach owners about minimal restraint handling. So certainly that can be done without a kitten kindy, that can be done on a one on one basis with you encouraging your owners to bring kittens in for maybe one on one nurse appointments where the nurse can talk to them about minimal restraint handling and about teaching toleration of veterinary examination, pill giving, etc..

Probably, the most important thing then is the selection of a suitable venue, suitable environment as well because these kittens need to be in a positive emotional state to benefit from this experience so cat only practices may lend themselves more readily to this concept that a practice of mixed species. And I think that even for cat only practices, running a kitten kindy successfully can be something of a challenge.

Ok, so going on to the messages that we want to be imparting to puppies, puppy owners sorry, and then we’ll go on to kitten owners. What are the main sort of fundamental pieces of advice that we want to get across? And whether we want to get this across in consults or in puppy classes or whether we are going to do it in emotional intelligence type courses or individual vet nurse appointments, we need to get some very important, specific messages across to our puppy owners. And I have just listed them here so we will go through each of these. So advising on appropriate socialisation and habituation, teaching body language signalling, making sure that the owners are not sucked in to the dominance myth (and I’ll explain that in a bit more detail), and discussing the principles of self-confidence, expectation and compliance. Those three factors are extremely important in creating emotional stability and maximising emotional capacity. And then encouraging appropriate handling and appropriate social interaction.

So let’s first of all look at socialisation and habituation, we do hear an awful lot about these two processes, unfortunately, although we hear a lot about them they are quite badly understood. And there are very many young animals who don’t have appropriate socialisation and habituation. So if you look at this picture at the top here, this dog is not learning anything positive about this small child, in fact the child although smiling might not be smiling in a moment, because that animal is in a negative emotional state and may well become defensive, particularly because it is on a chain, so this is not anything to do with socialisation, and there is a fine line between sensitisation and socialisation.

What is important when we are thinking about socialisation and habituation is the emotional state the animal is in during the process. As a veterinary practice, it is really important that the advice that we are giving to our owners is based on scientific principles. There is a lot of information now about emotional states in dogs and about the influence of those emotional states on learning. So we want people to understand that socialisation and habituation is about exposure, it is about coming in to contact with, for socialisation, animate objects so members of their own species, ourselves, other pet species etc.. It is in the case of habituation about exposure to the environment, and to noises and to traffic and to different sorts of context. But the young animal must be in the correct emotional state for socialisation and habituation to occur. If the animal is in the negative emotional state as can be seen in these two pictures, then they are actually being sensitised, in the top picture to car travel and in the bottom picture to children. And we can do a lot of damage if we just give out checklists that say make sure before you come back for your second vaccination or before you come back for six month health check that your dog has been exposed to the following, and you just send them home with this list, the owners at their most zealous point of their relationship with their dog and they want to tick as many boxes as possible. If they are doing that without knowledge of the emotional state of their animal and the need for that to be positive they may well be sensitising and not socialising and habituating.

And I am sure you would agree in this photo these puppies are not having a positive experience of interacting with children.

So, once you have got them on the right lines in terms of socialisation and habituation and understanding the need for the emotional state to be positive, we have then got to teach basic body language because how are you going to know what emotional state the animal is in? You are only going to know that if you can read the signals that these animals give to indicate their emotional state. Observation of animals directly at puppy classes can be difficult because behavioural signals are momentary. Many, many owners have got dogs that do show a lot behavioural signalling indicative of a negative emotional state but have no idea that those signals are actually being shown. And many times in consults when I am seeing animals with emotional disorders, and the owners are there in the room with me and I am watching the animal and I usually video the animal at the beginning of the consult and then ask the owner if they have seen any of the following signs, so I’ll explain to them about displacement behaviours which you can see illustrated in this photo here, so the yawn and the stretch which are displacement behaviours associated with emotional arousal which is approaching the threshold of emotional capacity for that particular individual. These sorts of behaviours, I’ll note when I’m seeing it and then I’ll say to the owner, have you seen any of these behaviours in the last five minutes while we have been watching your dog, and they’ll often say no. Then I’ll play them back the video and there’s the dog yawning maybe four or five times. They’ll say ‘oh my goodness, I didn’t see that’, you don’t see things you’re not looking for. So it is really important to consider the use of photos and videos because owners can then watch it at a slower speed, they can stop it, pause it, note it. They are going to miss things in real time. We also need to explain the importance of explaining signals in context because if you look at this dog here yawning and stretching, I have just said that those can be displacement behaviours and indeed in this picture they are, but equally though, if this dog has been asleep for 8 hours, it’s just the morning and they are just coming down for the first time and the dog has just got out from bed, then stretching and yawning may actually be normal. So it is the context that we need to be looking at, we need to remember that displacement behaviours are normal behaviours exhibited in an inappropriate context. So if the dog is stretching and yawning in the context of a social interaction, then that is likely to be a displacement behaviour, doing it when they have just got out of bed, having been there all night may be normal. The other thing we need to remember is that a lot of the body language signalling that is done by the dogs, and we will talk about it in cats as well later, is actually quite passive and subtle. It is the sort of thing you do need to learn to see. So we mustn’t assume that an owner is going to know what emotional state its puppy is in, whilst they are doing the emotional exposure, unless we have taught them, given them factsheets, information, handouts etc. to teach them how to read basic body language.

Dispelling the dominance myth is the next thing on our list for the puppy owner. And it is incredibly important to put this myth to bed, it has caused untold damage to animal welfare, to canine welfare over the last 20-25 years and maybe even longer. We have had a massive set back in the progress of canine welfare, particularly domestic dog welfare, because of the people who expand the dominance myth and justify their punitive interactions based on this misinformation. So yes, it is really important for owners to realise that dogs are group living animals so they yes are socially obligate as we are, as horses are, so they are a group living animal that has an obligation to engage in social contact. What is important is to know that these animals live in what are family groupings, so instead of talking them about packs I think we are going to move away from that terminology which tends to go back to that the idea of the wolf, and we now know that yes, although there is a relationship between dogs and wolves, they’re not the same thing. There is a lot of research coming out of Budapest University now under the team of Adam Miklosi, looking at the family dog particularly. Because a dog that is working, a dog that is on the farm, a dog that is in the show ring, dogs are in various contexts and they are not all the same, they don’t all behave the same way, they don’t necessarily have the same cognitive interpretation of the environment they are all in, or the same emotional interpretation. So the family dog, the pet dog, is actually quite a unique being. So groups operate like families, we need to understand the biological function of groupings, when animals live in social groupings, when they are socially obligate. We need to dispel the myth of dogs wanting to take control, of dogs wanting to be megalomaniacs, dogs wanting to lord it over their human masters. We need to change dog owners’ perception because unless they are actually observing animals and interacting with these animals, taking in to account the world from the dog’s perspective, we are going to have a continuation of the threat to canine welfare.

So we need to reverse this trend of punishment based inhibitory training, it is based very much on the dominance myth, it is also based on a misunderstanding of what a behavioural sign is. A behavioural sign is no more than a medical sign, so if a dog is behaving in a way that the owner would rather they didn’t, be that barking or lunging or biting particularly, that behaviour is not the problem, it is an outward manifestation of the problem, the same way that diarrhoea is an outward manifestation of gut damage. When you are treating, you are going to be looking at the underlying cause. So you are going to be looking what is the trigger, so in the diarrhoeic dog maybe that is bacterial or inappropriate food or maybe a virus, the gut damage is the underlying cause and the outward sign which is the diarrhoea. In the behavioural equivalent of that, the trigger which may be a person, it may be a vehicle, it may be traffic, it may be a dog, it may be noises, the emotion that is created by that may be fear, may be anxiety, may be frustration and then the outward sign which may be barking, lunging, biting. In order to make long term progress we are going to be looking at the trigger and the cause, and thereby modifying the sign. Not trying to inhibit the sign without paying attention to the underlying cause. I don’t overestimate there, there are millions of dogs suffering at the hands of not nasty owners but misguided owners, most of the owners that we see with behavioural problems where there is a human component to it are nice people, they love their dogs, they wouldn’t be taking behavioural advice otherwise, but they are misguided and they have blindly followed inappropriate advice that has been given to them by trainers or that has come to them via the television. And we know that is a very invasive way of giving information, to actually take the information in to someone’s living room and a way that is very powerful and can cause enormous problems.

So what do we want to do if we don’t want to be encouraging any kind of suppressive techniques? When we are thinking about emotional stability and prevention of behavioural problems, so dealing with puppies at this stage, there are three real aims of establishing emotional stability. The first is high self-confidence. Now high self-confidence immediately, sort of, lies in conflict with the dominance myth. So the dominance myth is all about controlling the dog, it’s all about making sure the dog never makes a decision on its own, the fact that the dog always takes leadership (in inverted commas) from the human. Leadership in not a bad thing because leadership does not squash the confidence of others, leadership is a completely different thing to dominance. So high self-confidence can be maintained whilst also giving leadership, we will come on to that whilst talking about compliance in a moment. So high self-confidence, this needs to be encouraged, dogs do need to be encouraged especially when they are young puppies to make decisions independently of their owners, so rewarding and encouraging dependency and needy behaviour is going to limit their self-confidence. One of the things that is very important here is misunderstanding between dogs and owners in terms of what our interactions mean. So this lady on the photograph here, is very definitely positively motivated, her intentions are good, she is trying to show what she believes is affection towards her dog but she is actually encouraging dependency and needy behaviour and limiting the self-confidence of that dog, I am going to come on to that a bit more when I talk about appropriate interactions between people and their dogs a little bit later. So high self-confidence is very important.

If we think about male dogs, we know that self-confidence is influenced by the presence of testosterone. So one of the important things in your preventative behavioural medicine approach is to consider the correct timing of castration for male dogs. That decision should always be based on that individual dog’s level of self-confidence, there is no correct time to castrate the male dog in terms of behaviour, it will always be an individual decision based on the dog’s level of self-confidence. Very confident dogs may well be able to be neutered earlier, any male dogs who are low in self-confidence, who are showing signs consistent with low self-confidence and usually anxiety, which is perpetuated by low self-confidence, it is really important to just delay on that administration of the castration, particularly surgical castration because it is totally irreversible of course, so it is important to make sure you make that decision based on that information. We should be doing appointments for owners to come in and make a decision on castration based on their individual dog, not booking them in over the telephone at six months as a routine intervention.

What about realistic expectation? Well realistic expectation is incredibly important in emotional stability because this is the prevention mechanism for frustration. So frustration is the emotion which arises when your expectations are not met. If your expectation is realistic for the environment that you are living in, then the risk of those expectations not being met is going to be minimised. So when we talk about realistic expectation that does rely on setting house rules. And those house rules are important. The house rules again are going to be individual, what you want your dog to do and what I want my dog to do are not going to be the same thing. Personally I don’t like to have dogs upstairs, that doesn’t mean that it is wrong for dogs to go upstairs, that is my personal decision with my dog, if you want your dog to go upstairs there is nothing wrong with that as long as that house rule is positively and consistently applied. So what you do need is to have a family meeting, if it is a family situation, a meeting if there is more than one owner, and you need to discuss, you need to decide what your house rules are, why you are putting them in place, can they be applied positively and consistently? So things like, for example, the baby gate which you can see which establishes an expectation for the cat that it can go wherever it wants, which is absolutely right if you are a cat, we will come on to cats later, but if you are a dog then it not right to have an expectation that you can go in to this other room whenever you want, you are only going to be able to go through when the gate is open, as in the larger part of the gate. Also if it is not possible to have consistency, and it may well be possible to have households where it is not possible to have consistency because of the differing expectations of the owners, probably the biggest one is allowing the dog on to the sofa or on to the bed, if that is a particular problem of consistency then you do need to use discriminating stimuli. So discriminating stimuli are things like if you look at the picture at the bottom right where the little dog is on a sofa on a bed, it is important that that little dog is allowed on the sofa but the other dogs in the family may not be allowed then there is a discriminating stimulus. So that bed is on the sofa then the little dog can get up. So blankets, you can see the Boxer in the other picture with the throw on the chair, they can be extremely useful ways of discriminating which pieces of furniture the animal can get on, or indeed the times at which the animal can get on the furniture by the throw or blanket not always being there. Expectations need to be set at a realistic level to protect these animals from frustration. That is nothing to do with dominance. So we are not applying these house rules for the sake of the owner, or for the owner to be able to lord it over the dog, or be dominant, we are doing it for the emotional stability of the pet, such that they have a realistic expectation about the environment that they are living in.

Compliance is the third component of emotional stability, and compliance is very important but it should be moderate. It is essential for a group living animal to have compliance with other members of its group, we can’t have anarchy in a group living animal because it doesn’t work, we need to be working together. In terms of the multi-species group living that we engage with humans and dogs, it is incredibly important for us in terms of safety and control for us to have a level of compliance, and there are legal implications for the control we have over our dog, in a public place but also in a private location now that the dangerous dogs act has been expanded up to April 2014 to cover private property as well as public spaces.

So yes, compliance is very important however, compliance needs to be achieved through positively applied training. So we need to make sure that owners understand that the emotional state of the animal whilst complying must be positive. That means that our training methods and our cues need to be consistent, so we need to be using training methods which encourage positive emotional state whilst recognising the significance of cues. And you’ll notice I’ve used cues and not commands there, I think that is very important because if you think about the word command and you look at a failure to carry out the requested action that has been commanded, then the fault would lie in that case with the individual who has been disobedient. However, if we are using a cue and the animal fails to carry out the action that had been cued then the failure is with the deliverer of the cue, because the cue is obviously not clear enough. So if we think in terms of training cues I think that increases our attention to our delivery of the cue and whether we’re doing a good job in the training process rather than whether the dog is being obedient or not. Compliance is not necessarily obedience, compliance is being able to follow cues and therefore give behaviour which is suitable and compatible with group living.

Overtraining can be a cause of limiting self-confidence, this is something we see quite a lot. We may have animals which are incredibly obedient and have a large amount of compliance in terms of responding to training cues hopefully but often commands in these situations, and overtraining can limit that level of self-confidence and therefore predispose to anxieties which can be seen in the collie in this picture. Dominance myth also damages self-confidence, so if you look at this picture at the bottom of this slide you can see the facial expression of the owner is one of frustration and confrontation and the facial expression of the dog is one of confusion. We have got a miscommunication here, the owner is putting the animal in to a so called alpha roll, this is based on a misinformation, dogs do not roll each other. So yes, dogs do roll in the presence of other dogs as a form of communication about their emotional state but this is an offered behaviour, the individual that rolls makes the decision to roll, they are not forced in to it by the other dog. And when they do this rolling, what they are actually doing is offering information about themselves to the other dog in order to limit confrontation. So this interaction makes no sense for the dog, firstly it is being forced in to the position which is abnormal, and secondly the whole point of such a position is to reduce confrontation and this case is increasing it so massive problem here with inappropriate training techniques damaging emotional stability.

Harsh training will also induce fear, this animal is not learning to sit, it is learning to be frightened of human beings who are handling it. So using harsh training techniques will induce negative emotional states and threaten emotional stability.

What about encouraging appropriate handling and social interaction? Which was our final point for dealing with dogs or puppies in prevention. Many human interactions can be misinterpreted and emotional conflict, which is where you have the presence of positive emotional state and negative emotional state in response to the same trigger is something which is very common in family dogs because of the fact that clients often don’t understand the difference between human and canine social signalling. So you can see in these situations, firstly the lady at the top who is engaging in facial contact with her dog and the little child at the bottom who is engaging in tactile contact in the form of a hug, or an enveloping social interaction tactile social interaction. These are behaviours which from a human perspective are signs of affection, so we seek proximity, we touch, we make facial contact when we are engaging in positive emotional interaction with another human. Unfortunately, for the dogs perspective, increase in proximity, tactile interaction and facial exploration are signs of uncertainty, so things that dogs do when they have a level of anxiety. And they are ways of gathering information, both muscular tension information and scent information from the other dog in order to understand the potential for conflict and to limit that potential for conflict. So when you look at these two pictures, the dog’s interpretation of the human interaction is completely different to the intention of the owner.

 And owners are often engaging in these sorts of interaction as you see here, engaging in interactions which from the human perspective are believed to be positive but from the evidence of the body language of the dogs in these photographs is that from the dogs perspective this is not a positive social interaction. So we need handling and social interaction to respect normal canine behaviour and also to guard against emotional conflict. If we look at the bottom photograph of the dogs eating the cake off the table, this is a situation where there are three dogs in the household, so for 362 days of the year there is no dog birthday and any cake that is on this table would be out of bounds. So owners would be shouting at the dogs and telling them not to touch food that was on this coffee table. Three days of the year each of them have a birthday, a cake is put on to the table and the dogs are actively encouraged to eat it. You can see from their eye position, their body postures, their ear position that these dogs are apprehensive, they are in a state of negative emotional anticipation or anxiety because they are now not knowing. Yes it is cake, that’s nice, but my anticipation of taking things off this table is that I will be in trouble and the majority of the time that is the case but now all of a sudden they are supposed to take it. So we need to think about the sort of interactions we are having. The time to get owners to understand this is when their puppy is very young, at the beginning of their relationship, and we have a major part to play in getting that advice across.

So I want to take my attention now to kittens. And we can see that the list has some similarities and also some differences. Advising on appropriate socialisation and habituation is going to be the same aim for kittens as it is for puppies in that we need kittens to be in a positive emotional state to socialise and habituate. They will also become sensitised if they are in a negative emotional state. But there are also some differences as to the sort of things that we want to expose our kittens to, so we don’t for example want to habituate our kittens to traffic, it’s a bad idea, we want cats to be frightened of traffic so they will stay away from it. So we have got a different checklist if you like, remember that the checklist without explanation of the need for a positive emotional state can be dangerous and the same applies to kittens. So advice on the appropriate socialisation and habituation needs to be firstly based on the state of the individual cat or kitten, but also on cats as a species and on what we are actually aiming for in terms of that animal’s ability to live in a domestic environment. We want to teach basic feline body language, which obviously will differ because this is a cat not a dog. And we need to discuss social behaviour in cats and advice on resource distribution, which is very important for this socially non-obligate species, so now we are entering in to a different realm of behaviour in terms of initial motivation. This is a non-obligate social creature and therefore has different requirements in terms of its environmental needs. And appropriate handling and social interaction needs to be encouraged.

So let’s look at teaching basic feline body language. Probably the best time to do this is in your kitten information evenings. This is the ideal time to use videos and use photos to explain the importance of body posture and also facial expression. One of the things that is important in cats is the fact that their facial expression changes more rapidly that their body posture, so that means if you want up to date information about the emotional state of the cat you really do need to know how to watch facial expressions and watch ear positions, eye trajectories, those are going to give incredible information about the up to the moment state of the animal. And the body can take a little bit of time to catch up. So in the bottom picture on the left hand side of the screen where you can see the black and white cat, that cat is showing an alert facial expression, the ears forwards, a positive alert level of arousal, you can also see that the body posture which is a lateral recumbency with the hind limbs extended and the paws at the front tucked under the body, where none of the four pads of this cat are in contact of the floor is indicative of relaxation. So basically for cats, their primary defence strategy is avoidance, so is to move away from things that are threatening, in order to do that they need all four feet on the floor, so in this picture where you can see that the cat actually has not got all four feet on the floor, is not in contact with the floor and therefore is not able to run away if it wants to suddenly we have got to remember is a sign of relaxation. However, that body is going to take a while to recover from that posture and to go in to a posture of being in an alert state, the head however can do that very very quickly, so it is important to look at the head as well as looking at the body language.

If you think about feline social behaviour, one of the biggest problems is actually the popularity of the cat, the cat has become increasingly popular because of the fact that it fits in very well with the demands of modern domestic life, it fits in very well on a day to day basis in terms of its interactions with humans, less demanding for example in terms of the need to be let out to go to the toilet and those sorts of things but there are some limitations in terms of its social behaviour for living with people which are often overlooked. They have different social behaviour from the obligate social species that we are and also that dogs are. So in order to maximise the emotional health in cats and to minimise the negative effects for cats it is important for us to give information to the kitten owner about the self-surviving nature of the cat, in other words the solitary survival nature of their personality and their social behaviour so they can better understand the stresses of living in a multi-cat environment or even in a multi-species environment, either with ourselves or with dogs.

There is a significant increase in the number of multi-cat households and socially compatible cats can live together very well, and it can be extremely beneficial for the cats and for the owners and these sort of ah pictures you can see here indicate a positive multi-cat relationship and they can be very beneficial.

The assumption that cats need a friend in the way that we do, that they are socially obligate in the way that we are, leads to households of incompatible cats and this is a major problem in terms of welfare. And it is something that can be tackled very early on in the cat owner’s relationship with their cats. Informing owners about social behaviour in cats, about the basis of social compatibility in cats is very important in terms of preventative behavioural medicine.

Multi-cat households are often forced to actually share their vital resources in a restricted environment in terms of space. So they are often in situations where their resources are all lined up together like you can see the litter trays in the bottom picture. There are also other problems with these litter trays, the size of them, the amount of litter in them, many problems here but also the lining of them up all together is a problem. You can also see in the top picture cats being fed together, they are being fed together in so called double diners which totally fly in the face of normal cat behaviour because double diners either encourage cats to eat and drink in the proximity, so you put food in one end and water in the other, which is against their natural behaviour where they will select to eat away from their water source. So they really want a distance between their food bowl and their water bowl, preferably for those resources to be visually protected from one another – in other words when you are drinking you can’t see your food bowl and while you are eating you can’t see your water bowl. So that is a very important part of normal feline need, to be able to be visually protected when using a resource, not only food although food is a totally solitary behaviour so eating is a totally solitary behaviour, whereas you can get shared usage of things like litter trays and resting places by individuals who are in the same social group. But all cats do need full access to life essential resources so basically if you have more than one cat in the household the question to be asking is if all of the cats in this household needed to go to the toilet at exactly the same time would they be able to do so without running in to problems with another cat? And you can apply this question to other resources. Would every cat in this household if they all wanted to eat at the same at the same moment in time be able to do so without running the gauntlet of another cat? So free, immediate access to life essential resources is a golden rule of feline behaviour.

So resources need to be distributed according to social groupings so that we don’t get inappropriate mixing of social groups around essential resources which will instil negative emotion and lead to chronic stress which can have as well of course potential medical consequences. So I have said that cats are solitary feeders, that they want their water away from their food, that they are wanting to have toileting areas which are quiet and private. It is important to establish this with owners at the very beginning of their relationship with their kitten.

We also need to think about encouraging appropriate handling and social interaction with cats. And one of things it is important to understand is that as well as not being obligate in their social behaviour, is that kittens and also cats are high frequency, low intensity interactors and we are exactly the opposite, so humans have low frequency, high intensity interaction with their friends and their family and the cat has this high frequency, low intensity interaction. So it is really important again for owners to understand that they need to interact with their cats in a way that is more passive, so the more an owner has a hands off approach to handling, the more that the cat has the ability to dictate the amount of handling and has access to natural coping strategies if it feels socially tense the better. So kittens need to have little hide outs, they need to have elevated resting places, as do adult cats, so that they can use these natural coping strategies of hiding and elevation if they perceive there to be social tension in their environment with either other cats or with people.

When it comes to people we need to encourage owners to think in terms of minimal handling. And that is something that as a veterinary profession we have been educated on more and more recently, and the cat friendly practice scheme that is run by icatcare for example, promotes this idea of minimal handling and very importantly. Owners often don’t understand that in their own relationship with their own pet. So they kind of think about the fact that the cat is likely to be stressed whilst it is at the veterinary practice and they kind of think maybe a different form of handling is needed but actually it is needed at home as well. Research has clearly shown that where the owner is passive and the cat is the initiator of that social contact, the amount of time that the cat spends in the social interaction with their owner will be increased. So you get a better quality relationship with a cat if you back off and allow them to come to you. So patience in an absolutely essential virtue if you are going to live with cats and also for those of us who want to work with them.

A hands off approach is definitely your preferable way of handling because physically restraining can be potentially threatening, however well-intentioned it is on the part of the owner. So I am not suggesting for a second that these owners are actively engaging in threatening interaction, that is definitely not their intention, but the intention is not the important thing as we saw with the dogs, it is the perception on the part of the recipient of the action that dictates whether it is a positive or a negative emotional experience.

So we have looked at both cats and dogs, we have looked at applying preventative behavioural medicine for the species. With any of the species we have talked about, both cats and dogs, the first clinical examination is absolutely crucial. This is the point at which both the animal’s perception of your practice and the owner’s perception is going to be set. So we talked about minimal restraint for cats but it is actually important for dogs as well to start with minimal restraint, to use appropriate use to treats to create a positive emotional state as well and to minimise confrontational interaction. We have to understand that some of our interaction is by its very nature confrontational or aversive, for example, sticking a needle in to the skin could be potentially an aversive experience. What do I mean by appropriate use of treats? Well it is really important to remember that the treat is used to create a positive emotional state, you are not using the treat to reward a behaviour, this is not a training experience, and therefore the treat must be delivered before a negative emotional state has arisen. So the ideal time to use treats in a preventative behavioural medicine practice is for puppies and kittens when they are coming in without a pre-formed conception of what a veterinary practice is, when the don’t know what to expect, that is the point at which we use treats to create a positive emotional state.

Puppies and kittens need to learn to trust human hands, so it is essential that we do not interact with pets in a way that is punitive or a way that induces pain. Scruffing in cats is never appropriate for example, we want to deliver veterinary care for these animals throughout their lives and in order to do that you need to be able to get your hands near to these cats and dogs as they get to be adults. So instilling trust about human hands is essential in preventative behavioural medicine, so we want to make sure that the cats and the dogs see us as being positive, but also that owners see veterinary staff interacting appropriately with their pets because if you are not interacting appropriately you are setting a bad example, owners will expect the veterinary profession to know what is the best way with interacting with the species they are dealing with.

So it is our duty, as veterinary practitioners, both nurses and surgeons, members of veterinary practice staff, to safeguard the welfare of the animals entrusted to our care, that is something that is fundamental to veterinary practice. So if we think of puppies, advising owners about preventative behavioural medicine is part of our duty of care, we need to encourage owners to raise emotionally stable and self-confident dogs, but we need to enable them as well as encourage them. They need to be able to do this but we are the ones who need to give them the tools to be able to do that successfully. There are legal implications for dogs and there are far reaching welfare implications if we fail in our duty to provide owners with appropriate guidance so they can interact appropriately with their pets.

For kitten owners it is equally important to offer appropriate advice because we know that chronic stress is a risk factor for cats living in domestic environments, not only in terms of mental health and behavioural problems but also in terms of physical disease so minimising chronic stress by educating owners about normal cat behaviour and how to understand emotional states in their cats is something that is incredibly important.

So in conclusion, behaviour is a vital aspect of any veterinary medicine, it is a branch of veterinary medicine, we talk in terms of behavioural medicine in the veterinary field in contrast to training which is not behavioural medicine, neither is behavioural medicine training. Very definitely there is an overlap in behavioural medicine that can be filled by non-veterinary behaviourist in terms of applying learning theory, but in terms of safeguarding the mental health of our patients, that is a veterinary responsibility. So we need to incorporate it in to everyday general practice, the veterinary profession has a huge responsibility to work towards preventing behaviour problems because it is the welfare of the animals entrusted to our care that should be our primary concern.

Thank you.

Anthony: Thank you so much Sarah, that was fantastic, and I think it is interesting that when I was at college and you were at college, dermatology was taught within the syllabus and so on, and I probably got involved in dermatology in the second wave as there had already been a first wave of people wanting to take it to a deeper level. Really there was very little behaviour when I qualified and you have really been in that front wave of getting people more and more interested and it is a slog but I really think you are getting there because that was a fantastic talk today. Obviously testimony that over a thousand vets and nurses have been listening to this today means that there is a need for this training and people want to get better at doing this kind of stuff as well don’t they?

Sarah: Yes, certainly and the animals, the owners and the veterinary practice staff will all benefit if we can do that so thank you to Pedigree and Webinar Vet for the opportunity for delivering education to people free of charge because that is something that is a real privilege.

Anthony: Yeah, and are you ok for a couple of questions, is that alright?

Sarah: Yes, certainly.

Anthony: Ok, so we have got Gemma asking are we able to claim SQP points for this webinar, this isn’t an SQP webinar, it was set up as a veterinary and a nurse one but obviously I think any of this for an SQP nurse or an SQP who is working in a pet shop, it‘s so important that in the end we don’t think of points all the time, we think of learning and becoming better at doing our jobs when people present puppies or kittens towards us. I do hope that has been a benefit for you Gemma. Sarah, I know you have done webinars before but this is your first one with us and of course one of the weaknesses of webinars is that you don’t hear the tumultuous applause when you have finished as you would usually do at conferences. But just to put your kind at ease, people haven’t fallen asleep, here is Paddy saying fantastic and informative webinar, thank you so much. Sarah and Elizabeth have said really informative webinar, thank you very much. So there has been plenty of positive comments, but let me got through and ask you a few questions. Hi Sarah, thank you for a fantastic informative webinar, I would be very interested in more details about your puppy training classes, so I think this is the one you were talking about that you will be doing…

Sarah: Developing emotional intelligence for puppies, yeah. The best thing to do is to email the office on office@brvp.co.uk.

Anthony: Let me put that on the chat box so everyone can get that, so office@brvp.co.uk. If you send a little email direct to Sarah’s office she can give you more information about that. David goes on, do these bear any similarities with life skills for puppies at Lincoln University’s behaviour clinic?

Sarah: Yes, there are some similarities but this is specifically for veterinary practices so the difference is that it is for veterinary practices, it is specifically, only for veterinary practices, it is not for dog trainers so it is very much tailored to the veterinary practice environment.

Anthony: Jody is saying are there any useful, appropriate websites you would recommend that we can direct our clients to for good advice?

Sarah: Well, yeah. There are not as many as we would like. Certainly things like if they are going to trainers, going to a suitable trainer is a good start. There is quite a lot of advice now from some of the food companies so certainly Joan from Pedigree may be able to give you some information whether they provide anything, some of the other food companies certainly do, so you can get a booklet and bits of information, there are websites. The other place is the manufacturers of the things like the pheromones, they provide a lot of owner targeted information about appropriate puppy and kitten rearing because those products can be useful as well to encourage a positive emotional state during the learning process, so there are quite a few things like that maybe more company and product led in terms of sponsorship for those sorts of sites. There is information out there. Increasingly, things like icatcare and the International Society for Feline Medicine, they produce a lot of leaflets as well which can be very helpful for owners .In terms of veterinary practices, another source of information for you to give out to your owners in terms of advice, behavioural advice are things like the life learn leaflet which you can also print out on your headed paper. There are a few resources out there.

Anthony: We have actually done some webinars for pet owners about pet behaviour and things, and things like why vaccinate your dog. Maybe this is an area where you and I should stick some things on our website. I think the idea of it is that people when they look at google and put in things like dog behaviour, or why does my dog pee in its bed or whatever, sometimes the advice that is on the front page of doctor google isn’t necessarily stuff that you would endorse.

Sarah: Very definitely not, no. And this is something I do think veterinary practices can really improve the knowledge base by their own websites and their own social media as I was saying at the beginning.

Anthony: Well this is part of what we are trying to do with the pet webinars, knowing that people will be going on with that veterinary advice and that advice is good, sensible, veterinary advice. So if people have things that they would particularly like us to do, you know we are always very open to having and email and then finding a relevant speaker to speak on that topic. I think there are still some more questions if you are happy to take those. It has just disappeared for a second, let me get it back again. How long does a behavioural consultation take at your practice?

Sarah: The diagnostic consult is three hours. So we offer three different types of consult, we offer a management consult with a vet which is an hour duration which is a nip this in the bud, prevent this from getting any worse which may be suitable often for puppies, and may need only a management visit. A diagnostic visit is necessary for an animal that has an emotional disorder and therefore needs a full investigation, those are three hours. And then we also have a rehabilitation team, so we offer follow up rehabilitation trainer visits and those are anywhere between an hour and two hours.

Anthony: That’s great Sarah, just while we are waiting for a few more questions I have just popped a poll up, just to see those who are listening, if they are vets, or vet nurses, vet students, I know we have got a few SQPs on as well so if there are any SQPs, and if you don’t fit in any of those categories you can put yourselves down as other. Karen is saying do you have a preferred method to tackle play biting in puppies?

Sarah: Yes. Play biting is an interesting one because again you have always got to look at the emotional motivation, so is it a form of desire seeking emotional system where they are actually trying to gain some form of a resource from you or is it that they are engaging in social play that has gone wrong because it is human flesh and not a dog they are engaging with. It is important for puppies to understand that the social play motivation that they are experiencing is fine but that they need to direct it towards something that is suitable for that. So you can engage in social play without mouthing. Obviously redirecting that behaviour on to something like a toy or a chew is important. If you are ever going to prevent an animal from engaging in a behaviour because it is unacceptable then there must be an alternative behaviour on offer instead. So it is no good telling a puppy don’t do that if you don’t tell it what it should be doing instead. So really, a transferring the behaviour of mouthing and so called play biting on to an object which is suitable to do that with is the name of the game. So it is always having something available with you when you are interacting with the puppy that they can put their mouths around and their teeth in to so that you can substitute that, it’s very very important.

Anthony: Another question from Chris, well more a statement, is to say that she wants to thank you for talking about cats and kittens as well as puppies, she says I used to run kitten info events for clients when I was in practice, I am now retired but I vet at cat shows and breed Burmese so I like to keep up to date with my CPD and she says thank you very much.

Sarah: Lovely.

Anthony: Just for interest for the audience, and for you Sarah. We have got 50% of the attendants today are vets, 41% are vet nurses, 2% vet students, 1% SQPs and 5% other. And those of you that are other it might be interesting just to tap down in the question box what you actually are so we can just out of interest know who is listening in. And I suppose that is, again, shows the important role that vet nurse have in this whole area, you know with puppies and kittens as well.

Sarah: Very definitely.

Anthony: Let me just see, there are quite a lot of questions, I don’t know whether we will get through them all. I think we will have another two or three. I think while I am looking through these I just want to thank Pedigree again for making this possible because there are many, just over a thousand vets and nurses who have been able to listen in today for free. I have learnt something today, I am sure everyone else has. It is such and important area because we so many dogs, and cats but mainly dogs, being sent back to shelters because people can’t cope because they have set the thing up in the wrong way to start with haven’t they.

Sarah: Preventative stuff is really important, if preventative behavioural medicine really gets taken to an extreme then we will be put out of the job and that would be great.

Anthony: What you need to do is make sure you stay in the preventative stuff and then you cannot have to do these three hours consults. Ben is saying when a puppy is not in a positive emotional state and is frightened e.g. when is experiencing traffic, how do you create a positive state when they really are frightened and they aren’t becoming calm with time, other than treats if they are not food orientated.

Sarah: Well first of all don’t do it, I mean if they are in a negative emotional state do not expose them to traffic, you are not going to be achieving anything positive. Go back a whole stage from that, so come back away from the traffic, go back home and work on the animal’s self-confidence and emotional state without the traffic there first and then introduce the traffic in a dilute form. Now the sound therapy for pets products that you may all be familiar with are now available free of charge from the Dogs Trust website so we have given the sound therapy for pets products to Dogs Trust on the understanding that they will be made available free of charge so on their website sounds scary and sounds sociable and sounds speeds are all there so there is a traffic one, sounds speedy which is available. So I would go right back if that animal is already in a negative emotional state, take it home, get it away from the traffic and introduce the sound of the traffic using the CD, or the download as it now is in this modern world from the Dogs Trust website to introduce the diluted form of traffic, whilst working on developing a more positive emotional state, higher levels of self-confidence, compliance and expectation as we talked about and then start to introduce your exposure again. Don’t try to use treats to change emotional state whilst they are already negative in the presence of a stimulus; that is not going to be successful.

Anthony: I suppose it just always becomes an escalation as well if a dog is already stressed out about something and they are still within the stimuli, they presumably just get worse and worse.

Sarah: Yeah, they would.

Anthony: Vicky has asked, thank you for a great webinar, given that we want positive early visits to the vet, when do you recommend microchipping is performed? And I think might be a trick question because it is going to become legal in about a month.

Sarah: As early as possible. As early as possible, the sooner it can be done the better. Base the administration of those microchips as well on the individual emotional state of the animal. Ideally I think it should be done before they leave the breeders. It would be better to be doing it early on, there is some evidence that doing it before the fear response has really being triggered would be better now that it is obligatory and every puppy needs to be done at that stage.

Anthony: I suppose the only problem is, when you have got a Chihuahua there is not exactly a lot to grab hold of.

Sarah: Yeah, exactly. It has got to be done on an individual basis.

Anthony: Great. Ariana said thank you for a brilliant webinar. And then Donna said thank you for a very informative talk, and my nine year old daughter really enjoyed it too so. Catherine is saying that this is (nine year old daughter needs to be off now because this is a watershed question) thank you for the talk, very informative. Humping is often a problem for owners of male puppies and they always want to get their puppies castrated as soon as possible, do you have any advice/tips surrounding this topic?

Sarah: Oh yes, this is one of our main ones. What is really important for people to understand is that mounting or humping behaviour is not necessarily hormonally driven, so it may be the result of the frustration system or the fear/anxiety system can drive that sort of behaviour as well. Really important as I was saying that we do not castrate dogs without doing an emotional analysis of their emotional state. So we need to meet these puppies before we make any decision, a phone call to the practice saying my six month old male dog is humping can I have him castrated, oh yes we will book him in for Tuesday, that is not acceptable. It really is important for them to come in and have a visit and for a discussion to be had about the behaviour, the context in which it occurs, the stimulus that is present when it occurs to determine is it emotional or is it hormonal. And even then, if it is hormonal, if we know that from examining that puppy that it’s emotional state is negative and it has a low level of confidence we may even then want to postpone surgical castration while we work on establishing confidence, so it is incredibly important that these animals are brought in for an appointment face to face with a veterinary surgeon, or a veterinary nurse who can also look at asking the right questions to determine the motivations as well, and they are not just routinely booked in.

Anthony: That is great Sarah. Obviously for those of you still on, if you had colleagues in your practice who missed out tonight because they were not allowed in after we hit our thousand limit, please apologise for us, the recordings will be up tomorrow and we will send you and email about that and there will also be a link if you go to the page where you can download your certificate. If you are logged in to the site you will actually see your name on the certificate as well. Just before we finish, Tina is saying if you have a puppy is in a very stressed state, that is unresponsive, emotional would you just spend time with the pup and reschedule vaccination?

Sarah: Very definitely yes.

Anthony: Great, Sarah, this has been absolutely marvellous. Those of you who are listening in and didn’t put in where you are listening in from at the beginning of the webinar just flick that on, and Sarah just a minute or two telling us about what we can expect next week. Is it just going to be another fantastic webinar? It is more aimed at older patients.

Sarah: We are going to go to the other end of life next week, we have looked at puppies and kittens, we are going to look at the older dog and cat in terms of what we can do to help. Oh I think we are just doing dogs next week, I might have said that wrong. We are looking at old age in dogs in terms of behaviour, so we will be looking at some of the problems of things like cognitive dysfunction, maximising our protection of that condition, approaches to treating it, but also just behavioural considerations in the older pet.

Anthony: Thank you once again to Pedigree for sponsoring this, Jane has been a great support of The Webinar Vet as has Louise as well. I am thrilled that more and more people are getting the CDP accessible and affordable so thank you Pedigree for making that possible as well. Can I recommend next week that if some of your colleagues in practice have missed out that perhaps you listen together with them? Make sure you are on about ten to eight and you should certainly get a place then, and we look forward to seeing you all next week at the webinar, same time, 8pm on Tuesday for the webinar on behaviour in older dogs. Sarah, thank you again, it has taken a while to get you on, bit of bribery with Liverpool football tickets and everything but it was worth it in the end. Thank you so much Sarah, I am looking forward to next week.