



Dr Andrew Sparkes,
BVetMed PhD DipECVIM
MANZCVS MRCVS

Veterinary Director
International Cat Care and
International Society of
Feline Medicine
Place Farm, Court Street,
Tisbury, Wilts, UK, SP3 6LW

andy.sparkes@icatcare.org

PREVENTIVE HEALTHCARE IN CATS – FROM PUTTING OUT FIRES TO PREVENTING THEM HAPPENING!

The purpose of this presentation is to provide an overview of preventive healthcare in cats, and in particular how this applies to the older cat. Published data suggests that, as a profession, we do not engage well with preventive healthcare, with a large gap being present between owner expectations and veterinary recommendations.

This presentation will explore the current state of preventive healthcare in cats and look at opportunities for improvement, especially in relation to the older cat which is likely to often have multiple diseases.

Preventive healthcare and the older cat

In Europe, the USA, and in many other regions, cats are now the most popular domestic pets. Their popularity continues to grow partly as a result of the unique pleasures of cat ownership, and partly as a result of changes in human lifestyles which, for many, mean owning a cat is easier than owning a dog.

Despite their popularity, cats generally receive much less veterinary attention than dogs with some data showing dogs are more than twice as likely to be taken to the veterinary clinic. Sadly, for many cats, once they have been to the veterinarian for initial vaccination and neutering, they may not be seen again until they have developed an advanced or serious disease.

Despite this, studies also show that cat owners care for their animals just as much as dog owners, and are equally willing to seek veterinary healthcare, but obstacles need to be overcome and clear recommendations need to be made to provide the framework for a proper partnership of care between the veterinary team, the owner, and the cat.

The need to engage pro-actively with cat clients is critical, as is the need to create a more welcoming and less stressful environment for their cats. More information about

the Cat Friendly Clinic programme can be found on the ISFM Cat Friendly Clinic site (www.catfriendlyclinic.org).

Beyond a better clinical environment, providing a life-long preventive healthcare plan that both the veterinary team and the owner understand and commit to, is the best way of protecting the health of the cat and preserving the human–animal bond. A good preventive healthcare programme will address all three areas that encompass preventive care, and these are:

1. **Primary prevention** - avoiding development of disease through, for example, vaccination and routine parasite prophylaxis
2. **Secondary prevention** - early detection of disease that may help, for example, to prevent progression of disease, and
3. **Tertiary prevention** - reducing the impact of disease through, for example, managing complications of established disease

All three of these aspects are important, and especially when dealing with an older cat, secondary and tertiary prevention have a much more important role to play. Effective preventive healthcare requires age-adjusted protocols and engagement with clients so that appropriate investigations are undertaken, depending on the lifestage and lifestyle of the cat.

Not every owner will necessarily follow a 'gold standard' preventive healthcare programme, and a successful plan will need to be tailored to the individual cat and cat owner. However, having an understanding of what can be achieved and what to prioritize during a wellness examination will help ensure the needs of the cat and expectations of the owner are being met.

A new programme from International Cat Care and International Society of Feline Medicine

HILLS: CAT FRIENDLY STREAM

Owners turn to a variety of sources for information on their cats' health. This may include the vet, but often also includes information from other sources such as the internet, friends, breeders along with companies and organisations involved in pet care.

CatCare for Life is a new, comprehensive preventive healthcare programme for cats from iCatCare and ISFM that seeks to make contact with as many owners as possible through a wide range of influences – the vet, the internet, the pet shop, the cattery, the rescue organisation, the breeder and so on. The initiative is aimed not only at people who already go to the vet, but also hopes to stimulate interest in those who rarely or never go to the vet by encouraging them to think more about their cat's health. A combination of materials and online resources make up a comprehensive *Partnership of Care* kit, providing a single set of standards with a consistent message. These are designed to provide the basis for a partnership between the owner, the vet and the cat to enable proactive lifelong care of the health and welfare of the cat throughout all its different lifestage. The programme enables owners to be an active participant in the care for the cat by being both fully informed and partnering with the clinic.

Further information can be found on the iCatCare dedicated web site:
www.catcare4life.org