

Importance of Documenting Animal Massage Sessions

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August 3, 2022

Massage practitioners work as a team with Veterinarians and clients to provide our pets the best care. This team approach is most effective when there is clear communication on all aspects of the animal's health and treatment by the providers. One of the most effective ways of ensuring this clear communication between parties is by providing clear and cohesive documentation of visits. In addition, clients should be forthright with animal health care providers on all aspects of their animal's health and treatment. In this paper, we will discuss importance of effective documentation by the animal's providers and owners.

Important of Documentation by the Animal's Health Care Providers:

Documentation is important by animal care practitioners in order to provide information on care, help resolve any client disputes, and protect practitioner from any malpractice claims. In addition, many states and certification agencies require documentation (Plit, 2001).

Prior to the appointment, the animal massage therapist should obtain the following documentation: 1) contact information and people authorized to provide animal care decisions; 2) medical history, current medications, and current treatments; 3) and signed consent forms (Plit, 2021). It's also very important to adhere to state laws and regulations regarding animal care, and stay within an Animal Massage Therapist's Scope of Practice (Rudinger, 2003).

At the beginning of the appointment, start out with explaining what you do, how massage compliments Veterinary practice, but doesn't replace it, and explain that only Veterinarians diagnose and prescribe treatment. Point out any contraindications of massage and limitations of your work(Rudinger, 2003).

In Traditional Chinese Medicine, the Four Exams or "Four Pillars" provide the practitioner with important insight prior to massage, which include: 1) observation; 2) listening (e.g, vocalizations, heart and respiration) and smelling (breath, body odor); 3) animal's health history (feeding, medicines/supplements, and lifestyle); and 4) physical palpation to look for any areas of tension, discomfort or abnormalities. The massage therapist should maintain documents on the results of the 'four exams.' techniques, areas massaged, and reactions to the massage. Document any observations on the animal's behavior after the massage. Document questions, follow up information provided, or follow up discussions with client (Plit, 2021; Snow & Zidonis, 2011).

Comprehensive documentation is also important for the health of the animal and aids other practitioners, especially if your animal has multiple health care providers.

Similar benefits of documentation have been found in human studies. One study found that EMS records missing 1 or more measures of physiological data at the scene had an

increased risk of client death (Dann, Schiff, Nathens, & Rosengart, 2010). Health care practitioners also found that comprehensive documentation by other providers lead to better care for the patients and improved safety (Bjorvell, Wredling, & Thorell-Ekstrand, 2003). In addition, documenting patient care and outcomes has been found to provide better patient outcomes (Morrison, 2020).

Importance of Client Documentation

In addition to the provider keeping good records, client documentation plays a pivotal role in the care of their pet. Animal massage therapists and other providers need accurate and thorough information from the client, in order to provide the best care. According to the University of Minnesota Veterinary College, one of the main responsibilities of clients is to provide accurate and important information on your animal's health history. This includes any documentation of the pet's past care from other Veterinarians or other providers. According to D'Arrigo (2022), the following documentation should be provided to a Veterinarian taking care of your animal:

- The names and doses of all of your pet's medications
- The kind of food they eat
- Their eating and drinking habits
- Their toilet habits
- Any recent travel or tick bites
- Past medical records, including vaccine history

By providing complete documentation which is accurate and relevant, the Massage Therapist or other providers are able to provide better care. There are other benefits of the client providing documented history and health information on their pet. Documentation plays a pivotal role in developing a patient-centered care model.

In human medical practice, patient-centered care entails requesting information, seeking clarification on health and treatment, and the client being an active participant in recommendations for assessment and treatment (Tinetti & Basch, 2013). In a study by Starfield (1979), it was found that patients fared better on health outcomes when the health care provider and patient agreed on the problem and solution. Patients who provided more information to their provider were more committed to treatment (as cited in Frankel, 2022).

Similar to human research, clients who provide Veterinarian's more complete information and documentation should be more likely to adhere to treatment and have better outcomes (Frankel, 2022).

Animal Massage Therapists need to record and maintain comprehensive documentation to provide the animal the best care. In addition, by seeking and obtaining all necessary documentation from the pet owner, you can have a comprehensive understanding of the animal's health history. Communication regarding documentation leads to a client-centered focus, involving both owners and providers, leading to better trust, commitment to treatment, which can lead to better outcomes.

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