

Tips for veterinary technicians that provide dentistry services Animal Emergency Center and Specialty Services

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Animal Dentistry and Oral Surgery Specialists, LLC

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1. **Be the advocate for the patient.** Observe; listen look, touch and smell. Your awareness can transform your dental department from where it is today to where you want it to be. It is fun and rewarding.
2. **Communicate well with your clients, doctors and area specialists.** It never hurts to ask questions if you are uncertain about what you see in your patients.
3. **Know normal anatomy** of cats, dogs and all other species you work with. Also know common problems with specific breeds. See the oral exam article in the compendium written by Dr. Kressin.
4. **Perform a consistent exam** of the patient and the oral-dental structures. Dental charting improves the medical record and patient care. Make note of every problem.
5. **Does your patient have the normal number of teeth?
How many teeth should puppies and adult dogs have?
How many teeth do kittens or adult cats have?**
6. **Extra teeth or supernumerary teeth can be a problem!
Why do you think?** Periodontal disease is the leading disease of all problems in small animals. Dental crowding due to extra teeth can lead to food trapping and periodontal disease.
7. **Missing teeth can be a problem. Why do you think?** This is extremely important in all breeds. Be sure to look carefully for missing teeth especially with small dogs such as Maltese, Papillion, Pugs, Bull dogs and other brachycephalic breeds. Dental cysts can be very serious problems that may lead to jaw fracture. Always take dental radiographs if there are missing teeth!
8. **Anomalous or malformed or odd shaped teeth are frequently a problem.** Periodontal disease is frequently associated with anomalous teeth. A dental radiograph is always needed.
9. **Is the Bite right? Some faces are in need of orthodontic braces.** Most pets do not need braces but they need help. If the lower jaw is

relatively short compared to the upper jaw; the lower canines and incisors may strike and injure the roof of the mouth (palate). These teeth may be moved into a normal position using orthodontic principles. Other treatments are available. Dr. Honzelka is writing a journal article about a new orthodontic technique that he has used to treat puppy teeth that strike and injure the palate. The benefit of this new procedure is to eliminate the pain associated with the oral trauma and to avoid the same problem with the adult teeth. The patient has a pain free mouth; the client does not have to spend money removing the puppy teeth and then spend more money treating the same problem with the adult teeth. Everyone wins with this new procedure and the client saves money in using the technique.

10. **Dental Radiology, Periodontal probing and charting** are worth the effort. These services set you apart from the groomer. Indeed the groomers are not afraid to recognize the importance of dental health.
11. **Discolored, fractured and odd shaped teeth** require more than just cleaning. The veterinarian must make a diagnosis for the patient's health. Additionally; draining tracks can be a sign of a serious dental problem. Where is the drainage coming from and what is needed for the patient? All of these conditions are potentially painful. To help these patients a diagnosis and treatment plan is needed. Did you know that root canal therapy is available for pets? Root canal therapy is typically pain free for the patient and can be performed quicker than extracting the tooth. The patient gets a pain free solution and saves the tooth at the same time.
12. **Dental extraction is sometimes the best solution!** It is important that the operator understands the local anatomy when extracting teeth. Each root must be completely extracted. The procedure is easier to perform when guided by dental radiographs. Dental radiographs help verify that the complete root has been extracted plus it verifies there is no broken bone or calculus within the alveolus prior to closure of the extraction site. All dental extraction sites are to be sutured closed to avoid pain and infection.
13. **Facial swelling can be misleading.** Never assume the upper carnassial is the problem. Dental radiographs are needed to evaluate for one of three potentially abscessed teeth. The problem may be more than one abscessed tooth or alternately, there could be a foreign body or an oral tumor.
14. **Abnormal looking tissue is probably abnormal! Do not ignore what you see. Waiting rarely benefits the patient.** Be sure the veterinarian is aware of all abnormal findings. This can be life saving. Animal Dentistry and Oral Surgery Specialists have ~35% cases in surgically treating oral tumors. Sometimes a biopsy can help and sometimes the biopsy can be misleading. It's all about technique.

15. **Is the discoloration a stain or a more serious problem?** How is the determination made about treatment of discolored teeth? What are the risks to the patient's health? Use of an explorer probe and dental radiographs are needed for stained teeth.
16. **Are worn teeth a problem?** Use of an explorer probe and dental radiographs will help to diagnose if these teeth are dead or alive.
17. **Tooth resorption is a serious problem.** You might see this in cats or dogs and be assured these lesions are painful. Waiting to treat these problems never helps your patient.
18. **If the tooth has a suspicious hole, how can we tell if it is a cavity?** Tooth cavities were considered to be rare in the veterinary patient. Today the condition is not rare. Early detection leads to elimination of pain and allows for saving of important teeth. Late detection of tooth cavities results in chronic pain and loss of teeth. Did you know that a tooth cavity is caused by bacterial fermentation of dental tissue? Can you guess how you can prevent cavities in dogs?
19. **Oral inflammation is painful!** Stomatitis is a term applied to widespread oral inflammation. The condition occurs in cats and dogs. Dental radiographs and periodontal probing are essential first steps in the diagnosis for these patients. Waiting never helps these patients.
20. **Teeth grinding is a serious problem.** Teeth grinding is frequently a sign of serious discomfort. Always look for something (anything) that looks wrong.
21. **"CUPS" is a complex condition in dogs with oral mucosal ulcerations.** This is a very painful problem related to plaque bacteria. Excellent client communication is needed to motivate clients to brush their pet's teeth. The only alternative is to extract all of the teeth (Yes all of the teeth).
22. **Why would you clean the teeth of cats or dogs?** What are the advantages of teeth cleaning? What are the risks of teeth cleaning? How can you reduce the risks? How frequently do the teeth need to be cleaned?
23. **What is periodontal disease and why should you care?** Periodontal disease is an infectious, inflammatory and destructive disease. Teeth and local tissue can be destroyed. This disease process is very painful at times and pain free at some stages. The local oral periodontal disease bacteria can enter the blood stream and cause problems in other locations. Where does the blood flow to carrying these bacteria? Did you know there are periodontal procedures that can save teeth and eliminate pain? If periodontal disease is recognized early, your patients can be treated to eliminate pain and to save teeth.

24. **If you clean teeth, clean them above and below the gum line at all surfaces.** Evaluate your own work. Take the three way air syringe and blow dry all dental surfaces. If you see chalky substrate, more scaling is needed.
25. **Are there irregular surfaces that will allow plaque bacteria attention?** These irregular surfaces can lead to problems and make you look bad. Dental restorations can make these areas smooth to avoid plaque and calculus accumulation. If you ignore these areas, the problem will not go away. The teeth will soon be unsightly, the patient will smell and the client might be upset.
26. **Do you brush your pet's teeth? Do you brush your teeth? Why or why do you not brush teeth?** A tooth brushing without question is the number one solution to periodontal disease control. It helps with cavity prevention as well. It really is up to you to prevent periodontal disease, not your vet. If your clients don't brush their pet's teeth, you may be to blame. The veterinary technician is an advocate for optimal patient care.
27. **How do you brush the teeth for companion animals?** How frequently are teeth brushing needed? Which teeth do you need to brush?
28. **Informed Consent is required in Wisconsin.** Never assume that dental extraction is acceptable to clients. Referral to the specialist is appreciated by most clients for services your practice rarely or never provides.
29. **Call 888-K9T-00TH** anytime you have Dental and Oral Surgery concerns! The Animal Dentistry and Oral Surgery Specialists have multiple locations for client convenience.
30. **www.mypetsdentist.com** This website has photos of every condition we discussed today and more.

Dr. Kressin and Dr. Honzelka are advocates for dental and oral health in companion animals. We are available 5 days per week to serve you, your veterinarians and their clients.