

THE FRITZ FACTOR: TEACHING VET STUDENTS ABOUT ‘THE BURDEN OF CHRONIC CARE’ EXPERIENCED BY CLIENTS.

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Owning a chronically ill or disabled animal can be challenging – physically, mentally, emotionally and financially. As vets do we really understand ‘the burden of chronic care’ that some of our clients experience?

For second year Vet Med students at UAF, we developed an elective course in chronic care. The aims of the course were increasing student awareness about issues associated with chronic care, both technical and non-technical.

3/10 students took the one semester course working with ‘Fritz’ a Doberman-mix dog diagnosed with fibrocartilagenous infarction. Fritz was paralyzed, with no deep pain perception, three months before the course began. The students were responsible for caring for Fritz 1-2 days per week. Additionally they selected a weekly discussion topic from the references cited below. For assessment, each student had to a) describe their pre-course expectations; b) write a weekly reflection on their experiences caring for Fritz and their learning points from the discussion topic; c) a post-course reflection.

From a clinical (technical) perspective, following Fritz’s neurological journey from paralysis to spinal walking helped reinforce the students’ clinical neurology education. The weekly discussion topics provided a useful forum for raising their awareness about a variety of technical and non-technical subjects.

The non-technical outcomes of this course are subjective. Reviewing students’ reflections indicate that they developed a greater understanding and empathy for the challenges facing owners who have to care for chronic patients.

But how best to objectively analyze these reflections?

We’ll be asking this question of the RTA members during this presentation.

References:

1. Veterinary Clinics of North America: Small Animal Practice; Palliative Medicine and Hospice Care Edited by Tamara S. Shearer. Volume 41, Issue 3, Pages 477-702 (May 2011)
2. BSAVA Manual of Canine and Feline Rehabilitation, Supportive and Palliative Care: Case Studies in Patient Management. BSAVA, Gloucester, UK (2010)