Patient Discharge and Owner Information

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Aims of this session

- Discharge procedure and the importance of owner compliance
- Long term recovery outcomes
- Additional supportive procedures to aid recovery such as Physiotherapy and Hydrotherapy

The Discharge

As discussed briefly in the previous session discharging the patient correctly can make a major difference in the final outcome of the patient

- The owner should be taken into a separate room before the patient is brought through
- The Veterinary surgeon should have discussed any X-rays and findings
- The owner should have purchased any items that they may need prior to collection of their animal. This may include items such as a cage if rest is required, or a harness if they have undergone ophthalmic surgery
- It may have been useful to have had the owner come in prior to collection to discuss and or practice if necessary procedures that will need to be performed at home. This may include physiotherapy techniques or injections in the case of the diabetic patient
- The owner should be shown any wounds/dressing and how they should be dealt with. It is worth remembering that in the cases of external fixator’s any scabs that have formed around the pin sites should not be removed
- Antibiotics and analgesics should be discussed
- Follow up appointments should be booked – this may depend on the surgical procedure that the patient has had
- The food that the patient should be having should be explained, if the patient has undergone laryngeal or oesophageal surgery the patient will need to be feed “balls of tinned food” as a bolus is less likely to be inhaled than individual pieces
Exercise requirements – if the patient is on diuretics then they may need to have frequent opportunities to urinate

Self trauma prevention

It is important to make sure that the owner understands fully what is expected of them and what the overall outcome of the patient will be. It may be worth getting them to demonstrate or explain to you any details or procedures that they are to perform.

Post operative checks

It is important that the patient returns to be examined for a post operative check. When this is will depend on the procedure that the animal has had

- If the patient has a bandage it may be necessary to check or change it the next day
- The patient may require repeat blood tests
- The patient may have gone home over night but may be required to return everyday - this is sometimes the case for spinal cases
- If the patient has had bladder surgery and the bladder needs checking

It is often a good time to discuss the “next step” with the owner
This may include:

- Hydrotherapy
- Physiotherapy
- Pain management
- Nursing clinics – such as mobility clinics

Mobility / Arthritis Clinics

These clinics are generally aimed at orthopaedic and neurological patients that require some form of rehabilitation. They may also be beneficial for some soft tissue surgery patients. The aim of mobility clinics is to restore normal mobility function and to provide pain relief.

A care plan is usually developed by the Veterinary surgeon giving guidance on the treatment that is required. Exercise protocols can then be developed, physiotherapy or hydrotherapy can be organised, diets can be modified and weight assessed. Additional supplementation can then be discussed and added where necessary. This may take the form of specific Veterinary diets.

Veterinary Nurses running these clinics need to have experience in pain scoring and pain management. This will enable them to score each animal’s pain during each session and compare it with previous pain score results. The Nurses can then educate the clients on how they can assess their animal’s
pain allowing them to evaluate their pet’s progress and make changes should they be needed.

The animals are seen on a monthly basis when results can be compared and treatment modified accordingly. They are run alongside Veterinary Surgeon check ups and are usually on a one to one basis. Again it may be beneficial to arrange one off group sessions to enable clients to share their experiences with other clients

Physiotherapy and Hydrotherapy

**Physiotherapy** – a therapy using physical or mechanical means such as massage, heat, exercise or electricity in order to relieve pain, regain movement, restore muscle strength and increase weight loss

**Hydrotherapy** – Involves the use of water either for the treatment of disease or trauma or for the general maintenance of good health

Physiotherapy must only be performed by a Veterinary Nurse under the supervision of a Veterinary Surgeon. A correct diagnosis should have been made.

The owner can be shown the basic techniques which can be performed at home however any additional physiotherapy should be done at the clinic

**Aims of physiotherapy**

- To increase the blood flow to the affected area, this assists the healing of damaged tissues and improves Circulation in elderly or recumbent patients.
- To reduce oedema and chronic inflammation
- To build up physical strength
- To improve motility and restore normal movement
- To relieve pain
- To reduce the length of the day in hospital for animals following surgery – TLC
- To reduce the build up of scar tissue
Conditions which may be helped by physiotherapy include:

- Injuries to tendons and ligaments with or without surgical repair
- Muscle atrophy
- Chronic inflammation
- Reduction of scar tissue
- Hip dysplasia
- Elbow dysplasia
- Osteoarthritis
- General back pain or joint pain
- Paralysis/paresis
- Pre/postoperative treatments
- Postneurological events (CVA)
- Oedema
- Excess secretions

Physiotherapy should however be avoided in:

- Patients with healing fractures
- Patients with disc prolapse

**Types of physiotherapy**

1) **Effleurage**

Effleurage is a gentle form of massage that should ideally be performed first before any other types of physiotherapy are used

- Massage directed towards the heart to promote circulation and promotes drainage of lymphatic fluid
• The technique is performed using stroking movements, with the palm of the hand progressing from the edge of the area being massaged to the centre

• It should last about 10 minutes

2) Petrissage

Petrissage involves squeezing and kneading, rolling and compression of the muscles in order to increase circulation

• It aims to warm the tissues in preparation for more intense massage techniques

• Benefits can include an increased supply of nutrients and oxygen to the muscles, softening of the fascia, decreased muscle tension and improved motility

• It can be performed using the whole palm or the fingertips and is applied directly to the muscle tissue

• The pressure used will vary according to the purpose of the massage and the condition of the tissues being worked

• It can be performed for between 10 and 20 minutes three to four times a day

Passive exercise

This is used when the animal is unable to move of its own accord

The aim is to improve balance, strength, coordination and a range of motions and to restore normal functions

1. the animal should be placed into lateral recumbancy

2. The affected limbs or joints should be flexed and extended in turn through the full range of motion

3. It is important that the joints are not over extended

4. The animal should be carefully restrained as manipulating joints may be painful

5. The affected limbs should be manipulated up to 10 times per session and 3-4 sessions a day
**Active exercise**

- The animal is encouraged to make the movements itself
- The aim is to increase muscle strength and improve proprioception
- The animal is supported using a towel or sling
- 2 nurses should support the dog and ensure that the floor is not slippery
- Once the animal is supported in a standing position the limbs should be placed on the floor
- The animal should be raised slightly off the floor and lowered gently back down, this will encourage the animal to bear weight and will therefore help to increase muscle strength and awareness of its limbs
- As the patient progresses and strength increases supported walking can be encouraged
- Session length can vary according to the condition from 2 minutes up to 10, 3 to 4 times daily

**Respiratory physiotherapy**

- Beneficial for animals with pulmonary disease and recumbent patients

The aims of this are:

1. reduce airway obstruction by improving the clearance of secretions
2. Reduce the severity of any infection by clearing infected material
3. maintain optimal respiratory function and exercise tolerance
4. reduce the level of respiratory effort for the animal
5. improve the level of comfort for the animal

**Thermotherapy**

- The use of heat treatment promotes vasodilation, which increases the blood supply to the affected area
• The application of heat relaxes the muscles and increases flexibility and is effective in reducing muscle spasms, swelling and pain

**How do we apply heat?**

• Hot water bottle, heat pads or infrared lamps

• Heat should be applied at a temperature of 40-45 °C for 5 – 30 minutes up to 5 times a day

• **Care must be taken to ensure that the temperature is correct so that the animal does not get burns**

• It is contraindicated where there is bleeding at the site of trauma, or in patients with peripheral vascular disease or diabetes mellitus

**Hydrotherapy**

The most common form of this is swimming, which is classed as a form of active physiotherapy exercise

The canine hydrotherapy association has put together guidelines for the use of hydrotherapy and it can be carried out by a Veterinary Nurse who can conduct a programme of controlled exercise in the water

• Swimming is a very effective form of therapy, as movements in water can be performed more easily than in the air due to the buoyancy eliminating the effect of gravity. In this weight free environment the animal is able to exercise the muscles with less stress

• Because of the increased resistance to movement the muscles are made to work harder in water than air therefore a short swim is the equivalent to a 5 mile walk

• Resistance can be increased with jets

• It is a very safe form of exercise that can be performed with no risk to damaging the joints

• In injured animals it removes the weight loading from the affected limb encouraging the gradual rebuilding of wasted muscles
**Aims of hydrotherapy**

- Restore muscle mass
- Reduce pain
- Increase the range or movement
- Assist with weight management
- Improve general fitness
- Improve balance and coordination
- Improve healing
- Reduce oedema

**Conditions which may benefit from hydrotherapy**

- OCD (osteochondritis dissecans)
- Hip and elbow dysplasia
- Spinal trauma
- Paralysis/paresis
- Cruciate ligament rupture
- Hip replacement
- Patella luxation
- Muscle atrophy
- Osteoarthritis
- Post op muscle restoration
- Obesity

Hydrotherapy can be carried out using a large tub or bath or a specially designed pool for animals

- If a large pool is used then the animal is supported in the water by a hoist or pole and is attached to buoyancy aids such as life jackets
- The water temperature encourages vasodilation which improves the flow of oxygen and nutrients to the tissues
- The temperature of the water should be between 27 and 37 °C
- It is a good idea to have 2 nurses conducting the treatments
- Prior to swimming TPR should be taken from the patient and if any abnormalities are noted the session should be cancelled
- Entry into the pool should be carefully controlled walking the animal into the water on a ramp or with a hoist
- The length of the session will depend on the animal and the condition, usually starting at 5 minutes and increasing to 30 minutes over time
- If the animal appears to be struggling the session should be ended

Wound management is also important in the postoperative period

The owner should:

- Be told how to recognise the signs that something is wrong for example, smell, patient interference etc
- They should be given guidance on exercise
- Provided with a cover for the bandaged

It is often useful to provide the owner with some written instructions. This will ensure that they haven’t missed any important instructions.

“Care of the ……………….Patient”, can be designed and pre-printed and given to owners on discharge

The most common ones are:

- With a bandage
- With a fracture
- With an external fixator
- Following spinal surgery
- Following thoracic surgery
- Following laryngeal surgery
- Following abdominal surgery
These information sheets should cover everything that we have previously discussed; they should include details of what to do if they are worried and the number to contact.

Patients should be returned to the practice if:

- They have gone of their food
- If they have vomiting or diarrhoea following abdominal surgery
- If they appear in pain
- If they appear to have worsened
- If the have become lame when they were previously weight bearing
- If they have not passed urine following bladder surgery
- If the owner notices changes to the surgical site, this includes the eye

With good aftercare and owner co-operation your surgical patient will recover quickly and have a good response to treatment.

References