

# SENIOR PET CLINICS

YOUR GUIDE TO STARTING  
AND RUNNING A SUCCESSFUL  
CLINIC FOR SENIOR PETS



## BENEFITS OF RVN-LED SENIOR PET CLINICS?

### WHY RUN THEM?

The value of nurse clinics can be huge, especially for older pets who are more at risk of age-related diseases which can be tricky for owners to spot or may just be shrugged off as 'part of getting old'. With pets living longer than ever, there has never been a better time to pro-actively safeguard their health and welfare.

It's not just the pets that benefit either – nurse clinics are a fantastic way to build confidence, experience and specialist knowledge within the nursing team, for both personal and practice advantage.

While you are well placed to identify the signs of age-related diseases, a vet needs to make the actual diagnosis.



## BENEFITS OF RVN-LED SENIOR PET CLINICS?

### WHY RUN THEM?



## 1. THE DIFFERENCE YOU CAN MAKE:

Improve the quality of life for pets. We know for many of you this will be the biggest motivator – having the opportunity to assess, evaluate and improve the quality of life of senior pets. Regular contact through RVN clinics allows for early identification and treatment of diseases, which are often crucial for better outcomes, and improving animal health and welfare.

## 2. ENHANCE THE PET-PRACTICE AND CLIENT-PRACTICE BOND

Regular contact with a practice improves bonding – for both the pet and their owner. This can help make vet visits less stressful for the pet, increase customer satisfaction for owners and provide them with a safe space to communicate about their pet, and help boost practice revenue.

## 3. PROMOTE PET-OWNER EDUCATION

RVNs are amazing educators, especially in geriatric care – with dedicated time to speak to owners specifically about the needs of their senior pet, you can make a real difference to pet's lives.

## 5. ADVISE ON HOME ADAPTATIONS

Encouraging owners to adapt their homes for an aging pet can be a contributing factor to increasing comfort and life expectancy. A video of where the pet lives now can help you identify what changes would be beneficial.

## 7. UPSKILL AND GROW YOUR CONFIDENCE

Learn and grow new skills and create a niche within the nursing team.

## 4. PROMOTE PREVENTATIVE HEALTHCARE

Important preventative health measures can sometimes drop down the priority list as pets get older, but older pets still deserve ongoing protection against the effects of parasites and infectious disease, as well as home care, such as dental hygiene measures.

## 6. INCREASE PRACTICE REVENUE

Through upselling, e.g. offering blood tests and selling dental kits, while offering an enhanced service and good value to your clients.

## DID YOU KNOW?

- On average dogs can be classed as 'senior' if they are 7+ years (although this is breed dependant)<sup>1</sup>
- Cats are classed as 'senior' when they are 11+, but should have annual health checks with routine blood pressure testing from 7 years<sup>2</sup>
- Dog life expectancy has doubled in the last 40 years<sup>3</sup>
- Owned cats live twice as long as feral cats<sup>3</sup>

## GETTING STARTED!

The key to setting up a successful senior pet clinic is forward planning... Be organised and be SMART:



## START BY ASKING THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS...

### WHAT?

#### WHAT DO YOU NEED TO START THIS SERVICE?

e.g. Consult room, equipment, stock in room (e.g. parasite prevention, educational information leaflets), protocols

#### WHAT DO WE WANT THE OUTCOMES TO BE?

### HOW?

#### HOW LONG ARE APPOINTMENTS?

#### HOW MUCH TO CHARGE?

Is it a free service for Health Club members?

#### HOW TO PROMOTE THE SERVICE?

#### HOW TO DELIVER CONSULTS

(can any aspects be done remotely?)

#### HOW DO YOU MAKE THE CLINICS CONSISTENT?

### WHEN?

#### WHEN ARE YOU GOING TO OFFER APPOINTMENTS?

Ask the practice manager or do some market research to select the best time, e.g. is there a natural gap in other types of consults, when are the owners of senior pets most likely to be available etc.

#### WHEN DO YOU WANT TO START THE SERVICE?

### WHO?

#### WHO DO YOU NEED TO SPEAK TO IN ORDER TO SET UP THE CLINIC?

#### WHO WANTS TO BE INVOLVED?

## TOP TIPS FOR PROMOTING YOUR SENIOR PET CLINICS



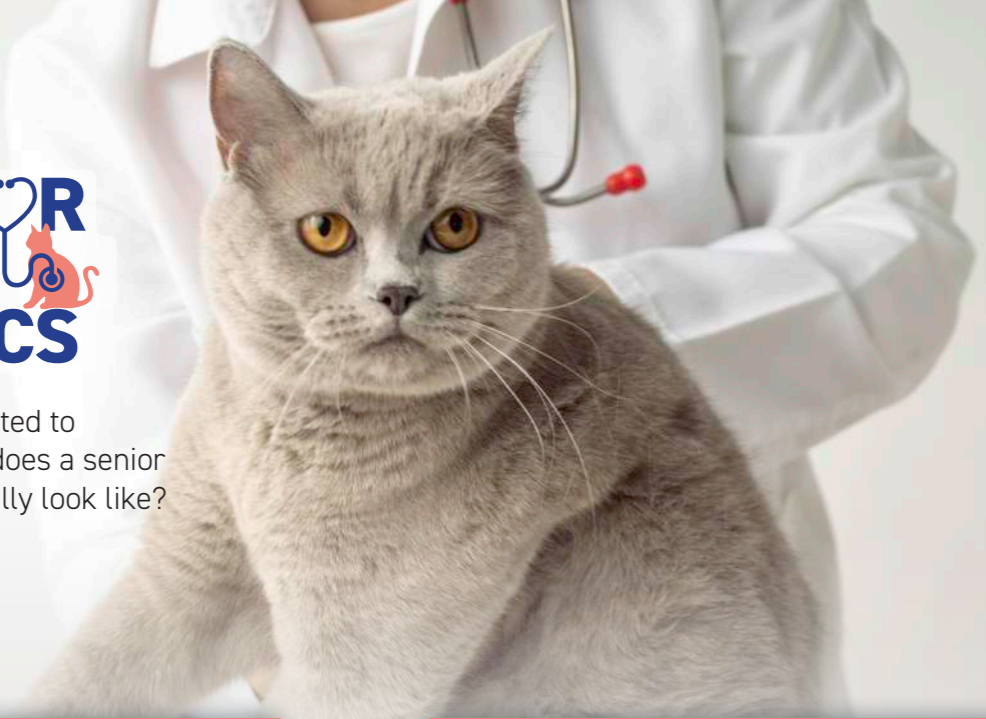
For your new service to be a success you need to have the whole practice team on board and ensure your clients know about it!

- Set up a meeting to tell the whole team about the senior pet clinic – be specific about the purpose of the new service and who it is for. Encourage the vet and reception team to book in patients.
- Regularly remind the team at practice meetings or in internal newsletters or other internal communications.
- Champion key team members that are already committed to being involved – celebrate their enthusiasm and how it will help them develop. It's infectious!
- Make a display in your waiting room, or use your waiting room TV so all owners of older pets are aware of your service – make it fun and engaging.
- Make sure the new service is advertised in all your client communications, such as newsletters and emails.
- Have a dedicated social campaign across your social channels, mix educational content with interactive fun posts e.g. ask people to share pictures of their golden oldies and share your team's older pet stories.
- Consider starting a practice senior pet month – offer a free initial consult if owners sign up during this month.





So, now you've committed to running a clinic, what does a senior pet clinic consult actually look like?



### SENIOR HEALTH-CHECK QUESTIONNAIRE



Preparing one of these ahead of time can be really useful – it gives owners more time to really think about their pet and an opportunity to be prepared with any specific questions or concerns.

For you, it acts as a prompt for discussion points and saves time in the consult itself, it also gives you time to discuss the answers while the pet settles. Just make sure you ask owners to be completely honest when they're completing the questions. We have an example you can use – the QR code is on the back page. Asking for videos of specific or strange behaviours can also be really helpful.

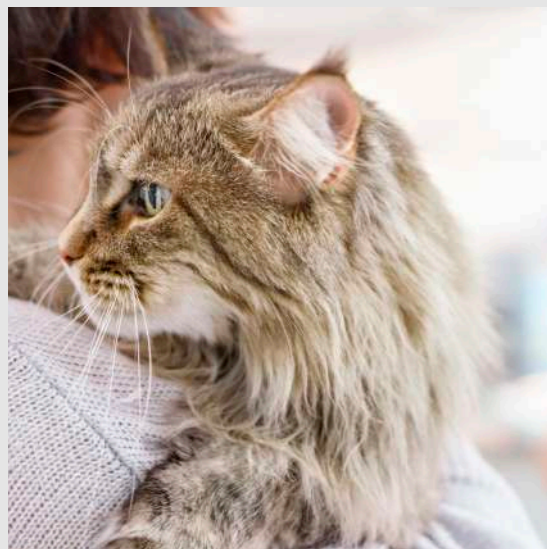
### YOUR EXAM



Perform your exam from nose to tail (or tail to nose if they are head shy) – be consistent with each animal. Provide enrichment throughout, stop if the animal becomes distressed and remember to tell the owner what you are doing as you go.



## TOP-TIPS FOR YOUR SENIOR PET CLINICS:



- Prepare your room 15 minutes before
- Wear your uniform and badge
- Introduce yourself each time
- Greet the owner and pet (knowing their name and gender for a personalised greeting!)
- Give the pet time to settle in the consult room – lots of fuss/treats/toys as appropriate. Let cats and rabbits explore if it is safe to do so
- Maintain good eye contact and get on the same level as your client
- Offer your client a chair if you think they need one
- Practice active listening throughout

## 10-POINT HEALTH CHECK

### 1. EYES



discharge, squinting, cloudiness, changes to the iris, pigment changes?

### 2. TEETH



have a dental chart close to hand – look for tartar and gingivitis – do they need a dental? A plaque torch can be great for this, if available

### 3. EARS



check pinnae and entrance to the ear canal – if you think an otoscopic examination is needed, call your vet

### 4. THYROID (CATS)



check for goitre and refer to your vet if concerned

### 5. HEART & LUNGS



pulse and respiratory rate and auscultate for any abnormalities that a vet should investigate further

### 6. ABDOMEN



look for any obvious distension or enlargement (no need to fully palpate)

### 7. JOINTS & MUSCULATURE



Discuss any mobility issues, look for any hair loss over joints and muscle wastage (there are muscle condition score charts available)

### 8. COAT, NAILS & SKIN



lumps, lesions or hair loss? Nail clip needed? Remember older dogs can be prone to overgrown nails which can put additional pressure on their toe joints

### 9. WEIGHT CHECK



record on PMS

### 10. BODY CONDITION SCORE



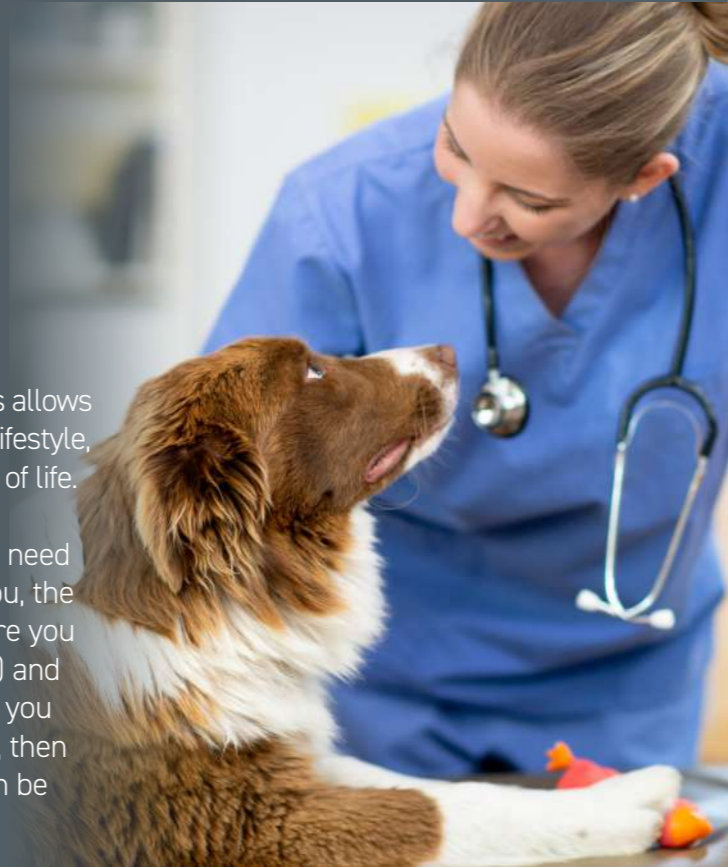
make sure your whole team uses the same scoring system and record on PMS. You can teach owners how to monitor this at home too.

### COMMUNICATION IS KEY

Make sure everyone running the clinic is comfortable with and able to speak to clients professionally and compassionately. Sometimes a bit of extra coaching or time shadowing may be needed to help someone grow into the role. You may have some really competent nurses who just lack confidence and need extra support to give them a boost!



### ADDITIONAL SENIOR PET TESTS



Subclinical illnesses are common and additional tests offer an opportunity to screen for diseases and pick them up early. This allows for early intervention - be that through treatment or adapting lifestyle, which can help slow progression and maintain a better quality of life.

A decision on which additional tests to offer senior pets will need to be made with your clinical team but only ever do what you, the owner and the pet are comfortable with. Be mindful of where you do the tests (some pets may suffer from separation anxiety) and keep up good communication with the owner throughout. If you need to stop because an animal is becoming too distressed, then be honest with the owner and positive about what steps can be taken to make the process easier next time.

#### Some options include:

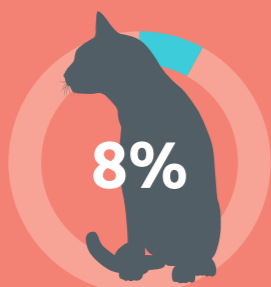
- Blood pressure checks for senior cats – see opposite.
- Urine dipstick and specific gravity – ask for a fresh sample to be brought to the consult. Advise owners how to best do this on booking the appointment and provide anything they may need e.g. non-absorbable litter. For cats remember to ask about their litter preference too. Urinalysis can help identify issues with kidney function, UTIs and diabetes.
- Blood sampling – use your practice's protocol for this and manage owner expectations as to when and how they will get the results. Blood tests can be used to screen for a number of conditions including kidney, liver and thyroid issues.

## THE NEED FOR EARLY DISEASE SCREENING

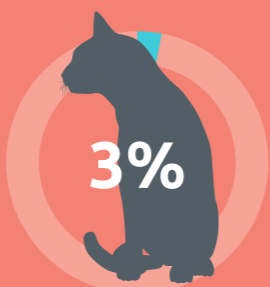
A study<sup>4</sup> assessing routine health screening in cats found that within 100 'healthy' cats aged 6+:



had abnormal urine specific gravity

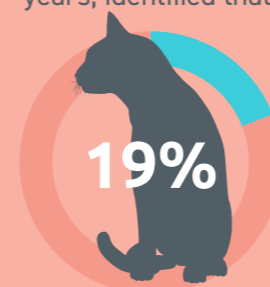


had high blood pressure



had high TT4

Another study<sup>5</sup> of 130 'healthy' cats, aged 6-9 years, identified that:



displayed changes in screening urinalysis and blood profiles diagnostic of significant disease



## FELINE HYPERTENSION

### WHY MEASURE BLOOD PRESSURE IN OLDER CATS?

**1 IN 5 CATS**  
over nine years of age have hypertension<sup>6</sup>

Up to **1 IN 3 CATS**  
suffering from Chronic Kidney Disease also has hypertension<sup>7</sup>

**7 YEARS OR OLDER**  
All cats aged 7 should have their blood pressure checked at least once a year<sup>8</sup>

If left untreated, feline hypertension can have **SEVERE CONSEQUENCES<sup>8</sup>**

LOSS OF VISION

BRAIN DAMAGE

KIDNEY FAILURE

HEART DAMAGE

We have a handy how-to guide for taking a cat's blood pressure here:



## DIFFICULT DISCUSSIONS

This is the part we all dread but if handled well can be hugely meaningful for owners – you just need to be prepared for them.

All owners want their pets to have a happy life and want to prevent suffering. They want to know how to best care for their pets as they age or manage specific illnesses, and this is where you come in. Through education - be it on general husbandry, medication administration, or teaching an owner how to assess their pet's quality of life so they can make an informed choice about the right time to say goodbye - you can make all the difference and help owners navigate some of the most difficult situations of pet ownership.

### QUALITY OF LIFE (QOL) EVALUATION

There isn't a formula to assess QoL; instead a collection of factors need to be assessed. Changes in older pets can be slow and subtle, so this is where the owner questionnaires are invaluable. Things to consider include a pet's:

#### Mobility



#### Sleep patterns



#### Cognitive dysfunction



Encourage owners to keep a journal. If a pet's QoL is deteriorating, then they need to be referred back to their vet for further assessment. It is really important to try and maintain consistency with which vet and nurse the pet and owner see to maintain the continuity of assessment, care and discussion with the owner.

If euthanasia is imminent, help prepare the owner by talking about the process and the options they have. This can help ease a stressful situation where uncertainty is often a large source of owner's anxiety.

## ENDING THE CONSULT

Before you close, always give owners another opportunity to ask questions – putting them at ease that no question is a silly one! It helps owners to feel like their opinion, questions and ultimately their pet, matters.

Always lay out the next steps clearly, if they are expecting blood results let them know when and who will report them. If they need a follow-up with a vet, book this in for them with their preferred vet, or alternatively book in another senior pet consult so they know that this is an ongoing service for their pet.

Try and provide educational material that supports what you've discussed so they can read and digest the information at home. Alternatively, provide additional information in an email, so they have something to go back to for reference.

Thank them for bringing their pet to see you and maybe ask for them to review your practice if it seems appropriate. A follow-up call 24-48 hours can help cement a relationship further and always makes an owner, and their pet, feel cared for.



So, there we have it, a quick guide for getting your RVN-led senior pet clinics up and running. As pets age, their healthcare needs change too, and these clinics play a vital role in promoting and maintaining health and welfare in our older pets. For more information, or for materials to support your clinic, please contact your local Ceva territory manager.





**SENIOR HEALTH  
CHECK LIST**



 **SCAN ME**

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**Ceva Animal Health Ltd**

Explorer House, Mercury Park, Wooburn Green, Buckinghamshire, HP10 0HH, [www.ceva.co.uk](http://www.ceva.co.uk).

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