



I recently read a Huff Post article entitled "The Real Reason Your Wait at the Doctor's Office is So Long." Veterinary Medicine and Human medicine vary in a lot of very meaningful ways, but we are also often the same. And in this we share a common weakness—we sometimes run behind schedule. In fact, I'd wager to say we frequently run behind schedule. So, when I saw this article, I expected to read a well-reasoned explanation of why this is the case by someone in the know. Instead, the article read more like one woman's angry Yelp review. Many of the comments in the article espoused similar experiences with complaints that doctors don't value their time,

overbook to cram as many appointments in as possible just to make a few bucks, and are generally greedy, no-good, shysters with big egos. As you can imagine, myself and many other health professionals took offense to this so I am here to tell you the REAL "real reason" your wait at the doctor's office (be that physician, dentist, veterinarian, chiropractor, etc) is so long—we care!

We care about you and your pet and your health, and yes, even your time. We care, and we are people pleasers who try to make everyone happy. We do our best to schedule responsibly (although sometimes there are managers and administrators who have more of a say in this than we do) but as Robert Burns said, "even the best laid plans of mice and men, often go awry." Nowhere is this more true than in medicine. Things are always going awry. Sometimes it's a true medical emergency—the dog that ran into the street and got hit by a car, the cat that can't breathe because it's having an asthma attack, the person who goes to their doctor for heartburn but is really having a heart attack. In these cases we have to stop everything we're doing to care for this emergency and that takes a lot of time.

Sometimes the problem is our own inability to say no. We save that appointment slot for an emergency and then someone calls up because their dog has a painful ear infection. Sure, it's not really an "emergency" but we can't stand the thought of that dog suffering in pain until tomorrow, so we fill the slot. Then the next thing you know, someone calls up because their cat has vomited 6 times in the last hour and really needs to be seen. Sure, we could say we're booked and send them to the emergency clinic, but then the client will wind up spending twice as much and they have two kids in college and can't really afford it. So we fit them in, even though there are no open spots and taking x-rays is going to put us even more behind.

We also get behind when simple appointments turn out to be not so simple. A client schedules a wellness appointment for vaccines and then "mentions" their cat is urinating out of the litter box, and can you check this lump and his breath really smells, and oh yeah, don't forget to cut his nails. Or the patient I saw the other day for what the client thought was an eye infection but really turned out to be lymphoma. I'm not going to rush an appointment like that just because I'm afraid of getting behind. Yes, I feel bad that I'm making the next client wait, but I know that if something terrible ever happens to their pet, they would want me to give them as much time and attention as they need, even if there are ten people in the waiting room who are just going to have to wait a little bit longer.

And sometimes it's not terrible news I'm delivering, but just someone who has a lot of questions. Sometimes I have to have a lengthy conversation on weight management or dental health, or the importance of heartworm prevention, that runs long. I could easily skip over these issues especially when I'm running behind. It's not a problem yet after all. But instead I take the time to make sure my clients are fully educated about their pet's health so that down the line I can hopefully avoid discussing diabetes management or the heartworm treatment protocol.

All of these things aren't a once in a while occurrence. They happen on an almost daily basis in medicine.

The truth is, maybe I could be on schedule more often. I really do value your time, but I value your pet's health more and if being better at time management means I'm gong to be worse as a doctor, then I'm not interested.

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