

Mobility Matters

A Lintbells Guide to setting up Mobility Clinics in Veterinary Practice



Welcome

to our Guide to setting up a Mobility Matters Clinic in your practice!

As a veterinary professional you'll be all too aware of the large numbers of patients affected by mobility problems. RVC data from 89 practices and involving nearly 4000 dogs,* shows that **15 percent of all cases present as musculoskeletal problems**. When it comes to cats it's likely that mobility problems are often undetected – with studies suggesting that **90 percent of cats over the age of 12** have radiographic evidence of degenerative joint disease**. As cats adapt by becoming more sedentary, owners often don't realise anything is wrong.

And of course, the consequences of a mobility problem can be severe over and above the pain the condition causes. Incontinence, due to posture or the inability to make it outdoors or to the litter tray quickly enough, and behavioural changes as the environment becomes more restricted, can also affect the pet's quality of life and the relationship with their human companions too.

Multi-modal approaches to mobility have long been advocated but can be difficult to deliver in a clinical setting. Dedicated Mobility Clinics are an ideal way to deliver high quality care and ensure that these patients receive the level of support and care they really need.

When you're busy coping with the day to day workload (and let's face it, that accounts for most days!) it can be hard to think about how a Mobility Clinic could be structured or promoted. Our aim with this guide is to provide you with a framework to set up a clinic in the right way for your practice. We hope it will provide a few hints and tips to help you improve the lives of pets suffering from a degenerative joint disease.

With best wishes

James Howie
Lintbells Veterinary Director



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* <http://www.rvc.ac.uk/vetcompass/learn-zone/infographics/canine>

** Hardie EM1, Roe SC, Martin FR, J Am Vet Med Assoc. 2002 Mar 1;220(5):628-32., Radiographic evidence of degenerative joint disease in geriatric cats: 100 cases (1994-1997).

Benefits to running a Mobility Matters Clinic

We've already highlighted just how common mobility problems are and how they already account for many of the cases you see. The time it takes to manage these cases well is also significant. The practice's primary consideration is always to provide patients with the best care possible and a Mobility Matters Clinic is a great way to do that.



WHAT ELSE CAN WE HOPE TO ACHIEVE?

EMPOWERING THE TEAM

Running a mobility clinic provides the nursing team with a way to use and build upon their skills and to develop within their role. Being able to take more responsibility for patients can be very satisfying. Managers may also want to consider how they recognise this additional commitment and provide some career progression for nurses who are successful. Measurable outcomes from nurse-led clinics, such as client satisfaction, incremental sales, or improved patient comfort or quality of life can be used to develop suitable reward schemes.

CULTIVATING CLIENT LOYALTY

The increased contact time and number of visits to the nursing team can result in better financial returns by cultivating loyalty and providing opportunities to find out about other services and products that may benefit the pet's health. It's not unusual to find that clients are less intimidated by vet nurses than vets (no matter how good their people skills are) and so feel more comfortable about asking questions. This can be very important when exploring barriers to compliance with regards to treatment recommendations.

HAPPY TEAM, HAPPIER WORKPLACE

By delegating the implementation of a multi-modal protocol to the nursing team, work flow is improved by freeing up time for veterinary surgeons to use their clinical skills more effectively. This structured approach to teamwork can be as motivating for the vets as for the nurses, potentially improving employee retention and making for a happier workplace.



Objectives



WHAT OWNERS WANT

Pet owners want their pets to be happy and looking after them to be easy. However, they often lead busy lives themselves, so be prepared to be flexible and consider whether some sessions can be managed remotely, rather than face to face at the clinic. Being responsive and able to adapt to individual needs will improve uptake of the services on offer. Having a range of available appointment days and times is vital. If demand is for weekend or evening slots, think about whether flexi-working can accommodate them.

CREDIBLE & TRUSTWORTHY ADVICE

Providing credible, trustworthy advice is important but owners are often looking for recommendations too. Using the words '**I recommend**' can be much more motivating than you might think. If it's best for the pet then don't be reluctant to be positive and try and make recommendations during every session.

CLEAR INSTRUCTIONS

Providing clear instructions and backing that up with written materials has been shown to be key to compliance. Follow up is another critical component of the process and can be supportive rather than a 'hard-sell'; position it as checking to ensure that there are no problems implementing your recommendations. You can also check, whether any help from you with specifics – such as giving medication or using specific pieces of equipment.

Using the words '**I recommend**' can be much more motivating than you might think.



WHAT THE PRACTICE WANTS

Take the team approach and discuss what everyone hopes to get out of the Mobility Clinic at your next Practice meeting. Different people will have different perspectives, so for some it will be about making sure patients get the care they need. For others it will be about educating clients about what they need to do and/or becoming more confident that the pet's condition can be managed. And, for some, there might be an expectation of increased sales of supplements, diets or exercise aids and even referrals to hydrotherapy units.

SETTING OBJECTIVES

Before you start your clinic agree key objectives together and make them SMART (Specific, Measurable, Agreed, Realistic and Time bound).

EXAMPLE OF A SMART OBJECTIVE

Refer at least 50% of all new diagnoses of degenerative joint disease to the Mobility Matters Clinic and to recruit at least half of those to attend within the first 6 months of diagnosis.

Team objective for front of house, vets and nurses.

WORKING TOGETHER

Although the Mobility Matters Clinic may be run by veterinary nurses, success will depend on everyone playing their part.

VETERINARY REFERRALS

Ensure that all the vets know what the clinic offers and the type of patients (and clients) you most want to target. It can be useful to have **Mobility Matters referral cards** (see page 15) that can be given to clients. Notifying you of likely participants will allow you to personally follow up by telephone or email.

FRONT OF HOUSE

Flagging up the veterinary recommendation will allow front of house staff to be proactive about following up with an offer of an appointment. Make sure everyone at reception knows what the clinic offers and can explain the benefits. Being able to observe what goes on during the Mobility Matters Clinic is a great way to help understanding, so if time allows why not invite a receptionist to sit in on a session (with the client's permission). Think about providing training, or take advantage of training from your Lintbells Business Development Executive.



A TEAM EFFORT

Don't forget to give feedback on successes, provide client testimonials for use in promotional materials and involve everyone in continually improving the service on offer.

Appointing a Mobility Matters Advisor who is responsible for implementation, reporting and improvement can ensure someone is always driving this important part of the project.



Speak to your Lintbells Business Development Executive if you would like support setting your Mobility Matters Clinic objectives.



Setting up the Mobility Clinic



STRUCTURE

What are you going to offer and when? Sounds simple doesn't it? It's often these simple details that cause the biggest headaches.

TIMING

This might be largely defined by the availability of a suitable consulting room. Remember it needs to be easy to access – the irony of not being able to get your patient up steps to access the Mobility Clinic won't be lost on your clients!

It would be ideal to bunch your clients together for a Mobility Matters Clinic, allowing them to support

each other and chat over shared issues in the waiting room, the reality is that people rarely fit in with your plans and the more flexibility you can offer the better.

Differing time slots and different days may mean your Mobility Clinic is a moveable feast but at least accessing it will be easy for everyone!

TO CHARGE OR NOT TO CHARGE?

This is a big question for many practices and it may be that you have already created a precedent by opting to offer free nurse clinics in other areas. Here are a few of the points you might wish to consider before making a decision to offer your nurse clinics for free:

FOR	AGAINST
No cost barrier for the client	Doesn't value the vet nurse's professional time (from a client or practice perspective)
Opportunities for additional product sales to generate revenue for the practice (recommendations, increased footfall, increased contact time)	Free clinics may be perceived to have less value (resulting in no-shows for appointments)
Ability to provide early intervention and detect conditions that would otherwise be missed	Few other professional services are provided free of charge – sets an expectation that veterinary team time has no cost or that other services should be provided for free
Added value service that may differentiate the practice from the competition	Free can be perceived as 'second rate', undermining the vet nurse's recommendations

ALTERNATIVE FEE STRUCTURES COULD INCLUDE:

- ✓ The cost per clinic is reimbursed against purchase of recommended products
- ✓ Clients registered with the nurse clinics receive discounts against products or services
- ✓ Nurse clinics are already costed within monthly Pet Healthcare Plans
- ✓ Offer the first session free as a 'try before you buy'

FACTORS THAT WILL HELP YOU DECIDE ON THE RIGHT COURSE OF ACTION INCLUDE:

- ✓ Past history: what has worked for the practice, what approaches have been tried and tested?
- ✓ Surveys/ Feedback: what do clients want or expect?
- ✓ Current protocols: can these be changed or can health plans be re-budgeted?
- ✓ Client base: how cost conscious are the clients?
- ✓ Profit potential: does any one individual clinic have more potential to generate incremental sales that will subsidise the cost of delivering the service?
- ✓ Brand values: does the practice focus more on providing a premium service or value for money?

There is no one correct decision here as it depends what is right for the practice. If you are recommending that a Mobility Clinic is put in place, having a position or some thoughts on costs and being able to back up your views will help gain buy-in from management.



Setting up the Mobility Clinic



ENVIRONMENT AND RESOURCES

Pet owners are going to be more relaxed if you provide a relaxing environment for the clinic sessions. If you envisage taking an extended history, provide comfortable seating if possible. Make sure you have all the aids you need to hand – if the clinic takes place in different consult rooms each time, create a Mobility Box that contains all the things you need.

Think about how you can 'test' mobility by walking the pet along a straight corridor, or checking how the pet copes with rougher ground, bending to the right or left, or climbing ramps or steps. This might mean that you need to create some 'break-out' areas where there is more room to manoeuvre. If none of this sounds possible in your practice think about using technology. History taking can be carried out in the owner's home via Skype, Google Hangout, Zoom, Facetime or by good old telephone! That also means you can do that at a time that suits the client – perhaps on a weekend or evening (if your practice can also be flexible about the hours you work).

Detail some specific movements you need to observe and ask the pet owner to video their pet performing them so they can be reviewed during the clinic session. Photographing areas of possible muscle atrophy or damage to paws or nails can also be recorded to help you track progression. Take a look at specific behaviours such as the posture needed to access food, or how the pet gets into the garden. This kind of day to day activity can be recorded or photographed and may give you some insights into what needs to change.

Think about asking to see the pet's lead and collar, feeding bowls, or bedding to see if there are some that could help. Use your Mobility Box to show some great examples of harnesses, head collars, heat pads, stands for feeding bowls, or laminated photos of the best types of beds for canine orthopaedic problems. Yoga or non-slip mats can also be a useful to make hard flooring more manageable for pets with problems for example.



Create a **Mobility Box** that contains all the things you need.

PROTOCOLS

Having set protocols to work through each time will ensure that nothing gets missed and that the permitted boundaries of what you can do are not exceeded. There will be times when the pet experiences flare-ups or other problems that you will need to refer back to the vet so be clear about when and why you might need to do that, right from the start. This means that there are no unpleasant surprises and expectations are clearly managed from the outset.

There's several areas to consider, here is an outline of some that you will want to address:

EXERCISE

Ensure the exercise is appropriate to the condition (duration, intensity, type of terrain, restraints such as collars or harnesses) and that alternatives are given where certain exercises cannot be performed. Think about rehabilitation aids and provide advice about techniques such as hydrotherapy, physiotherapy or massage where appropriate. Discuss what signs the owner can look for if they feel their pet might be unhappy about a particular exercise and how pain might be manifested.

WEIGHT AND GENERAL CONDITION

Excessive weight is associated with reduced mobility so regular weight checks and advice should form part of your Mobility Clinic. Include a general health check since many of these pets will be geriatric and therefore other conditions may be present or emerge over time.



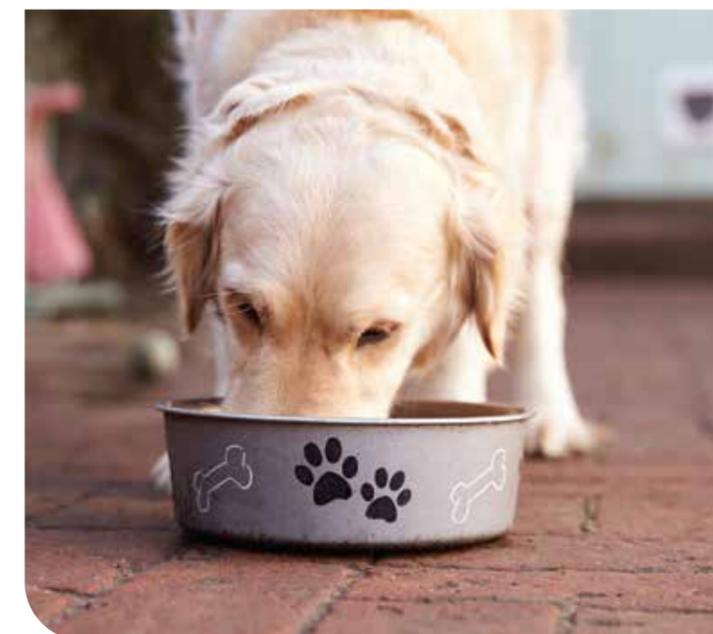
For a more detailed step by step guide to discuss mobility with clients contact your Lintbells Business Development Executive today.

BEHAVIOUR

Behaviour related to pain can affect the bond between the pet and the owner. Learning about pain management techniques and how to assess pain is really useful. Don't forget that for some pets the lack of stimulation and restricted outdoor access can really affect quality of life. You can provide advice about the use of ramps, bedding and appropriate toys that will make day to day life a little more pleasant.

TREATMENT

This might involve checking compliance with treatment recommendations, or looking for indications that treatment is no longer optimal and the patient needs referral back to the vet.



Marketing the Mobility Matters Clinic

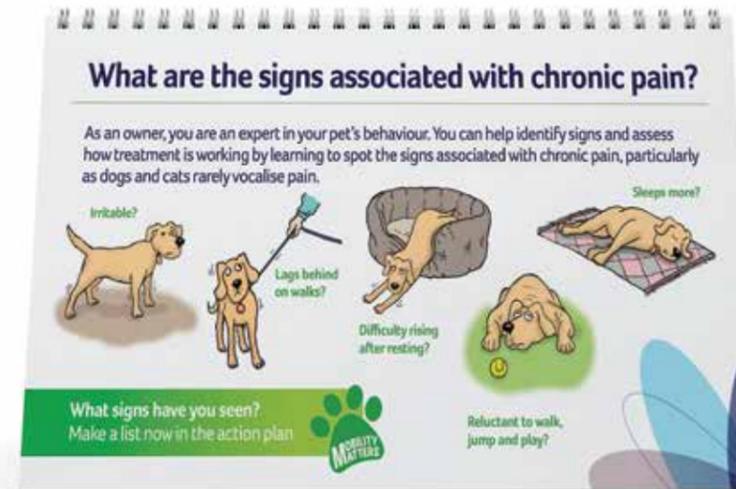


Although referrals internally within the practice will help to recruit new patients to your Mobility Matters Clinic it is important to reach out to those clients who already own a pet with mobility problems to let them know about the new service.

- ✓ Think about using Lintbells referral cards when patients come in for visits to check their repeat prescriptions.
- ✓ Use your Practice database to select those with a diagnosis of mobility issues and also those that may be predisposed to mobility problems on the basis of age, breed, or weight. Contact these clients via mailshots, email or SMS.
- ✓ Consider the potential for cross over with senior or weight management clinics.
- ✓ Think about creating an open evening or a day where anyone interested can pop along to find out more about the service. Use professional presentation materials such as flip charts, bone models and radiographs to make your topic come alive.
- ✓ Use your Lintbells wall display and other waiting room materials
- ✓ Contact pet owners via social media and the content provided as part of the Mobility Matters campaign. A simple repeating 'event' like 'Mobility Monday' can help create interest.
- ✓ Add everything in to an overall marketing plan that shows what will happen when and let all the team know about it so that they can support your efforts.
- ✓ Think about how you can network with other pet professionals, such as groomers or dog training or agility clubs so that you can support pet parents at an early stage. Difficulty self-grooming and pain on applied grooming can be a sign of mobility problems and can be easily missed.
- ✓ Contact your local newspaper to see if you can create some interest in the new service.
- ✓ Provide some very simple signs that pet owners should look for when their pet had mobility problems.



Support Materials:



Your Lintbells Veterinary Business Development Executive can signpost you to a range of Lintbells resources and deliver in practice training.

Here are some additional links you might find useful:

- https://sqptraining.learnupon.com/users/sign_in. (AMTRA accredited training)
- <https://spvs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Issue-5-1014-Nurse-Clinics.pdf>
- <https://icatcare.org/advice/cat-health/arthritis-and-degenerative-joint-disease-cats>
- <http://www.pawpositivestepsrehab.com/blog/canine-osteoarthritis-part-1-identification-treatments/>
- <http://veterinarymedicine.dvm360.com/physical-rehabilitation-improving-outcome-dogs-with-orthopedic-problems>

If you have any questions about **Mobility Matters**, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

Call: **01462 790886**

Email: **vet@lintbells.com**

We're open Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm.

