



URGENT versus IMPORTANT

EMILY has been feeling unsettled since that difficult euthanasia a couple of days ago. Mrs. Swinny broke down at the reception desk when she brought Max in, the phone was ringing off the hook, and Emily had three other clients to help. No exam rooms were open and she had to make the clients comfortable in the crowded waiting area. It was a disaster of a day for the entire practice and everyone bolted out the door as soon as work was done.

Emily isn't sure she can work in a practice where no one seems to recognize the pressure she is under to juggle wellness visits with people saying goodbye to their beloved pets—not to mention those angry about the wait time or bills. She thought working for a veterinary practice would be fun and uplifting. She thought she'd be part of a team that helped one another through tough times. No one really seems to care.

Working in medicine is a paradox. For most of us, veterinary medicine is an inspiring career choice. We get to work around animals, and help people in need. What noble work! The everyday grind, however, can make it seem like we're on a treadmill that never stops. There is always so much to do and we never feel caught up. Clients and patients keep pouring in the doors and we rarely have a minute to stop and think about our own emotional state, let alone that of our coworkers. We are at risk of "busyness" getting in the way of compassion for one another.

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Make sure that your team creates a supportive environment that extends beyond patients and clients to everyone on the team. Preventive care with one another is as valuable for the team as it is for patients.

- ✓ Make "timeouts" part of your culture. Team members need a brief time to step in the back and compose themselves after difficult client interactions. Be willing to step in and take a coworker's place temporarily when the need arises.
- ✓ Encourage check-in time at weekly staff meetings. Go around the room and let team members share difficulties and victories from work.
- ✓ Set up quick debriefing times at the end of particularly difficult days, when the team can release pent up feelings and provide support for one another.
- ✓ Take time each day to really "see" your team members and find a moment to pat someone on the shoulder or share a brief conversation.
- ✓ Watch out for one another! In the never-ending details of medicine and good patient care, it is easy to become so focused that we lose sight of one another as vulnerable human beings. If you see a team member looking distressed, take the time to check it out.

Skillsets addressed in this article: self awareness; relational competencies