



Thanks to Swedesboro Animal Hospital

# Dr. Allison & MRS. HYDE



After serious contemplation, finally decided that her lifestyle could accommodate a furry friend. She was delighted when she found Tobey at a local shelter and adopted her. Education and support were as important to Melissa as excellent medical care, so she followed the advice of some new dog-park friends and selected All Creatures Pet Clinic as Tobey's health care providers. She had been pleased with Dr. Allison, who had been friendly and helpful during Tobey's first visit.

When Melissa arrived today for Tobey's pre-renal check, she was concerned about the upcoming procedure and its impact on Tobey. She was happy to see Dr. Allison at the front desk. As they walked in, a receptionist asked Dr. Allison to pick up a call

from a client. Melissa watched the doctor's demeanor change from considerate to irritated. Although her voice was pleasant enough, her body language told another story. Hearing only one side of the conversation, Melissa wondered what the owner was saying to provoke Dr. Allison to respond with eye rolling, pursed lips, and negative head shaking!

Melissa suddenly felt intimidated and had doubts about asking her list of questions. Although getting answers to her concerns was important, she wasn't sure she wanted to risk having Dr. Allison become frustrated with her—or Tobey! The gracious veterinarian that she'd been so comfortable with during her last visit was swiftly replaced in her mind with this impatient professional standing in front of her.

**Realize that no matter how we see ourselves, clients tend to put members of the veterinary medical team on a pedestal. Unlike other service industries, many clients view us through a lens of power. Power, because we have a vast amount of knowledge that they know little about. Power, because they depend on us to care for them and their loved ones through illness and surgery. Power, because we deal with life and death situations daily. Understanding the potential of this power differential is an integral component of building dynamic, rewarding relationships with our clients and providing best care to our patients.**

**Skillsets addressed in this article: relational competencies; self-awareness; social awareness**



## Staff Exercise Power Dynamics in Medical Care

Medical care and therapeutic relationships are fraught with power differentials. Clients are watchful of signals and indicators that we take them seriously, are willing to listen, and appreciate their vulnerability. Discuss the following self-reflection and self-critique questions with your team to assess how you're doing.

- ✓ Do we invite and encourage information sharing with our clients?
- ✓ Are we open to clients' questions and concerns?
- ✓ How do we encourage collaboration with clients in the medical care of their pets?
- ✓ How do we ensure that we convey a message of dignity and respect, both verbally and nonverbally, to our clients?