

## An Explanation of Consultation Fees at Pike Moor Vets

A small number of our clients have asked why we charge for a telephone consultation, so we have written an explanation to help people understand why we do this.

Under normal conditions we would always carry out consultations at the surgery, with you and your pet in the consulting room with the vet. Whilst we would still prefer to consult in this way, it is essential during the coronavirus/COVID-19 outbreak that we all take steps to minimise face to face contact, slow the spread of the virus and protect the more vulnerable members of our society.

We have taken the decision only to offer a consultation in the clinic for patients where it is considered by the vets to be absolutely necessary. All other consultations will be carried out by telephone to avoid all unnecessary travel. Interestingly, as we at Pike Moor Vets came to this decision, the RCVS (Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons, our profession's governing body) and the BVA (British Veterinary Association, our profession's main representative body) both issued instructions that we must take these steps. To be clear, whilst we made the decision to restrict in-clinic consultations for very good reasons, this decision has been reinforced by the profession's governing body, the RCVS. They have made it clear that to 'carry on as normal' would be considered unprofessional behaviour and may result in disciplinary proceedings. The RCVS and BVA also advised that we should be carrying out consultations remotely wherever possible. i.e. we don't really have a choice anyway.

It costs the practice money to provide each and every consultation, whether this is at the surgery or by telephone. The fees we charge help in paying for the use of the buildings, the provision, maintenance and upgrading of equipment, paying each member of staff to work and investment in their ongoing training and improvement. Every member of staff undergoes ongoing training, including the most senior members of the practice. We are very lucky in the UK to have a fabulous National Health Service which we don't pay for when we use it, but this comes at considerable cost to us as taxpayers. If you were to pay for your human health care in the same way that you pay for your veterinary health care you would find that it costs considerably more! If we don't charge for the services we provide we will not be able to keep the practice running, so if we want to continue in our mission we will have to charge for our services.

Now it's all very well to tell you that you are simply paying for the cost of providing that telephone call, but you should also know what you get for your money:-

The vets in this surgery each have achieved very high grades at GCSE (or "O"-level in the oldest vet's case!) and A level. Following that they have each spent AT LEAST five years studying at an intensive level at university. Veterinary medicine requires among the highest A-level grades of any university course in the UK. Nevertheless, even these highly academic students find the course very intense and challenging and not all will manage to qualify. Those who do qualify are then closely tutored and mentored by more senior veterinarians so that their confidence and competence grows further over time. At Pike Moor Vets we have vets who have been qualified for very different periods of time. The benefit of this is that we have those who have been trained most recently by specialists in their fields working alongside vets with decades of experience. In recent years we have nurtured an atmosphere of mutual support and open communication within the practice, so we will discuss patients with each other whenever we feel that is beneficial. We each do so several times every single day. In this way we feel that we can come to the best decisions possible for that individual

patient and, of course, we are benefiting from each other's knowledge and experience and we can use that information again for other patients in the future.

Working alongside our vets are qualified veterinary nurses. They must also achieve a high academic standard and then complete rigorous and challenging education and training. Veterinary nurses deserve recognition in their own right as veterinary professionals. When your pets are admitted to the surgery for any reason, it will often be the veterinary nurse who monitors them, responds to their needs and assists or even instructs the vet in providing the best care for them. A veterinary nurse is so much more than a person who cares for animals. In addition to that quality, a veterinary nurse has a deep understanding of a patient's medical needs, what problems they may face either emotionally or medically whilst in the surgery, and how to prevent or resolve these as necessary. Our veterinary nurses are also very committed to their vocation and will often give time and care far beyond that which is expected of them. To date veterinary nurses have probably been undervalued for their work, so if you appreciate our work, please be aware that you are appreciating their work.

We exist, as a practice, to help your pets. When you have a consultation with a vet you benefit from that vet's professional intellect, intelligence, training and experience. You also, without realising it, benefit from the knowledge and experience of the other vets and veterinary nurses within the practice.

We charge a fixed fee for a consultation. Some may seem a little short, but others may be longer. Our fees reflect the average cost of providing that consultation for you. This helps to make costs more predictable for you and encourages a thorough approach. The alternative would be to start a timer as a consultation begins, then stop it at the end of the consultation and charge per minute. This would make the cost hugely variable and might discourage you from asking questions. We would not like to work that way and we suspect the none of our clients would like us to either!

The feedback we have received from most of our clients is that they are both delighted and impressed with the way we have adapted to the challenges presented by the coronavirus/COVID-19 outbreak. This is new territory for everyone and we can't claim to have got it right in every single case, but we can claim to have recognised, analysed and responded to those (hopefully very few) occasions when we have got it wrong.

Most clients are very happy that we provide remote consultations, mindful of the need to avoid unnecessary travel, and are happy to pay for the service we provide. We believe that the few who have not been happy about the fees only respond this way because we have not communicated the reasons for those fees and what they gain from them. We hope that, having read this quite extensive explanation, you will realise that the fees we charge are necessary, justified and that you do get good value for your money. Of course, we cannot operate a system whereby only those who are happy to pay do so, so even if you are not entirely happy with our fee structure, we will have to ask you to pay for our services in the same way that others do. If we didn't we would have to ask others to pay a little more and this would be unfair, but we are confident that this explanation will help.