



SHORT COMMUNICATION

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Clinical examination and weighing of patients in small animal consultations

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Context

Clinical examination is important in the detection and management of disease in small animals. Understanding clinical examination practices is the first step in determining the role of these procedures in the consultation. This study aimed to describe clinical examination and weighing of patients during small animal consultations.

Main conclusion

A full clinical examination was performed for almost two-thirds of patients presented, and abnormalities were commonly detected. Weighing was performed less often than clinical examination, although weighing was more frequent for some types of consultations and patients. This suggests clinical examination and weighing may be useful tools for the detection of underlying disease.

Approach

Data were gathered during direct observation of consultations at eight practices. Clinical examinations were categorised as full, focused or 'none'. Abnormalities detected by the veterinarian on clinical examination were also recorded, as was whether the patient was weighed. Data were also gathered on patient signalment, type of consultation and the number of problems discussed per patient.

Results

Full clinical examination was performed in 60.6 per cent (1145 of 1889) of patients and focused examination in a further 31.4 per cent (594 of 1889). Significantly more problems were discussed when a full compared with a focused examination was conducted ($P < 0.001$). Type of clinical examination varied by type of consultation ($P < 0.001$) and species ($P < 0.001$). Less than half of the patients examined were weighed (47.5 per cent, 897 of 1889).

Interpretation

The role of the clinical examination may vary between type of consultation and species, and full clinical examination and weighing may not always be practical or necessary. The results suggest a more thorough examination is associated with discussion of more problems, although these results should be interpreted with caution as the cause and effect relationship here is unclear.

Significance of findings

The results provide an insight into clinical examination practices. Future work could focus on identifying patient groups where a thorough examination is likely to have a positive impact on long-term health outcomes.