

After much contemplation we have decided to write this letter and make this post. We do not take this lightly and it saddens us that it has to come to this. Our intent here is not to upset anyone but rather to open the public's eyes to this concerning societal shift. COVID-19 has been a worldwide event, impacting everyone in many ways and sadly has taken many lives. We have felt fear for not just our own individual safety but for our families, friends, neighbors and co-workers as well. It has altered the way we live and has introduced a new level of stress to our daily lives. And unfortunately, in some cases, it has made individuals act out in ways that are unkind, disrespectful, rude and hurtful. And as we enter phases of reopening during this pandemic, the rudeness directed toward us is escalating. This is not something that is isolated to just us, it is something that is happening to our industry as a whole. But because it is now affecting the staff of our hospital, we will address it.

Dear Clients,

These past few months dealing with the Coronavirus outbreak has been challenging and we fully acknowledge the level of stress everyone is experiencing. We have been here every day, 7 days a week, committed to continuing to provide a high standard of care to our patients during this global pandemic. We have given up lunch periods and stayed late just to try and keep up with the increased volume of patients we are seeing. While you may have more time on your hands due to not working or reduced hours, we have less. We do not have unlimited staff or time. Please be understanding of this.

We have intentionally made the safety of our staff and our clients and patients a priority and will continue to do so, no matter what. It is the direct result of these safety measures that has allowed us to continue to provide uninterrupted care and service. And while we realize these new curbside protocols and safety measures require additional time, they are absolutely necessary. Understand that we want to keep everyone healthy and if a member of our staff tests positive for COVID-19, we will be required to close and will not be here for you or your pet. Our reopening will depend on the data from our governing body, the American Veterinary Medical Association. Science will dictate our decision, not the intolerance of people who are inconvenienced by the state of affairs.

So, due to the volume of patients we are seeing combined with the protocols to keep everyone safe, we are having an increased number of calls into our hospital which also means an increased number of calls our doctors are making to speak directly to our clients at their appointments. This means our phone lines are extremely busy all day, every day. Please don't get nasty and impatient with the person answering the phone. If you are asked to hold, this does not mean we don't care; this does not mean your call is not important to us. This does mean we have many people with pets who need care. This does mean we need to speak to every caller and it takes time. This does mean that in some cases our doctors phone call to a client can require additional time to explain a diagnosis and, in some cases, discuss a poor prognosis. These things will not be rushed. The local ER's are experiencing long wait times of 3 or more hours and other local hospitals when fully booked have been turning people away. Our volume of need has increased. We have always made our patients a priority and very rarely turn anyone away. We always try our very best to accommodate an urgent care situation, and to be there during the saddest moments when it is time for a client to say good-bye to their beloved pet.

Please know that everyone here is working hard every day. When you are having to wait longer to get thru on our busy phone lines or wait to speak to one of our doctors for an appointment or sitting in our busy parking lot watching our staff running in and out with pets and you are feeling frustrated for having to wait, please remember that what you can't see is our group of dedicated employees who work tirelessly every day to care for your pet. Some people complain that when they are waiting for an appointment, they see cars coming and going and they are angry they are still waiting. Know that people are coming to us for a variety of reasons. They may be here for a service provided by a technician, dropping off or picking up from grooming or boarding or picking up medication or prescription food. Not everything requires the same amount of time. Instead of yelling about waiting just ask us. We'd be happy to answer your question so you'll understand what you are seeing. And perhaps appreciate the long days involved for the staff that is running back and forth to retrieve and deliver the animals so that they are taken care of during this pandemic. And remember

they are doing this when it is sunny, hot and humid or raining. So, show them you are appreciative and say something kind or don't say anything at all.

Remember we have business hours for a reason. If you call at 6:55 p.m. because your pet has been vomiting for 3 weeks expect us to refer you to the local emergency facility. An appointment like this could take hours to work up and you called us 5 minutes before closing time. We have families and lives outside of work so please be respectful of this.

Also please plan ahead! Knowing that we are booked out a couple weeks we ask that you please don't wait until the last minute to make an appointment and then get upset because we do not have an available time slot to give you. Poor planning on your part does not constitute an emergency for us.

Some of you are concerned about your pets being in the building without you. Let us assure you that about 95% of our patients are calmer than usual because the building is not crowded and they are less stimulated by the sights, sounds and smells that would normally cause them anxiety. We would never harm your pet and if this is ever a question in your mind then you need to reevaluate your trust in us and consider seeking veterinary services elsewhere.

We ask that you please remember we are human beings too and we are tired. We have not had any down time during this crisis and we care for your pets with the same vigor we always have. We have made adjustments to our schedule to accommodate as many appointments for doctor exams and surgeries as possible while still trying to care for pets without an appointment who have an acute illness or injury and occasionally performing an emergency surgery. We are doing our very best, each and every day to be here for you and your pet(s).

In spite of our best efforts, our staff has had to endure impatient and rude behavior. We have experienced a surge of nasty, unreasonable, entitled people. It is both hurtful and disheartening when you have committed staff who are doing everything possible to be here and are working incredibly hard, to have them treated unkindly and with disrespect. So we ask that you *please* be patient when you are calling or waiting in our parking lot. We understand it is frustrating to wait but we are working as fast as we can without compromising our level of care. If you cannot find it within yourself to be a decent human being, please know that this behavior will not be tolerated and we will be happy to send your record elsewhere.

Now having said all that, we absolutely want to acknowledge all of you who have shown extra patience and even expressed appreciation. We are very fortunate to have many, many wonderful and understanding clients. We are humbled by the kind words and the trust you have bestowed upon us. We have worked hard to earn it and will continue to do so. Please know that it is a love of animals, big or small, young or old, that has drawn our staff to work at Arlington Heights Animal Hospital and we will continue to work tirelessly on their behalf. We want to sincerely thank you for trusting us, thank you for your loyalty and thank you for your patience and understanding, we are grateful for you.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter and we respectfully ask that you be courteous when calling or bringing your pets to see us. We share the common goal of your pet's well-being so please work with us to make this happen. Stay safe, stay healthy and stay positive. We will get thru this together and look forward to celebrating the day when it is safe to have everyone visit together and talk face to face again.

Drs. Kuhnle and Flaska and the Arlington Heights Animal Hospital staff