

Dear Clients,

My staff is incredible. The professionalism, comradery, and willingness to adjust with the times, while still focusing on our patient's health concerns, is outstanding. I feel incredibly lucky to be working with each and every staff member, and my respect for them is massive. As their employer, I feel it is also my responsibility to protect and take care of them. We have taken numerous steps to try and ensure their physical safety, but now I must take steps to ensure their mental health as well.

My staff and I have been drawn to this profession because we want to help you with all of your pet's health needs. We are working as hard as we can and we are extremely grateful for all the support and patronage we have received from our community. These days are very stressful for everyone and nerves are on edge for all of us. Because we have decreased our hours, removed client access to the inside of the hospital, and made numerous smaller adjustments in our day to day functioning, we are not able to run our hospital "as usual". No one wants this, least of all us. The limitations in availability have created stress for some of our clients, as we are booked several weeks out. What was once a simple Tech Appointment is now not nearly as quick and easy. This has translated into impatience and frustration by some clients who were used to the prompt and personalized service we were once able to provide. As such, we have seen an unfortunate uptick in clients who verbally berate staff members. The staff are trying their best to help, but they are also conveying messages these clients don't want to hear. I would like to remind everyone that we are in this together. We are a community who has historically shown how to care for, and respect, one another. I am saddened that I must remind everyone to work hard to respect one another, despite this incredible time of confusion and stress. We will be ok if we take care of each other.

The vast majority of our clients have been fantastic and are respectful of the limitations we have been forced to put in place. However, a small number are stepping over a line of common decency and are using my staff to vent their frustrations. My staff has been well trained, and they know how to deal with emotionally abusive clients, but they, too, are living with the stress of the times, and tolerating rude behavior is no longer going to be part of their job description. Our communal situation is not their fault. It is completely wrong to berate, yell, curse at, or threaten any of my staff members for any reason. **As such we will now institute a zero tolerance policy for any belligerent behavior aimed at my staff. Clients who cross over this line will no longer be offered veterinary health care for their pets at this hospital. This applies to every client, no matter the duration of your association, personal relationship with myself or another a staff member, or current health status of your pet.**

I am truly saddened to write this letter, but unsuitable behavior by several clients over the past few weeks has compelled me to act in a way that better protects my staff from any further verbal abuse.

Dr. David Shuman, DVM