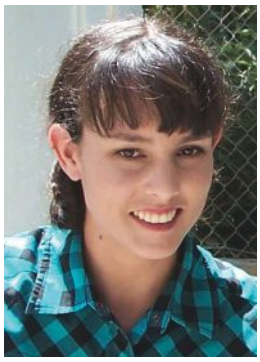
A Calming Touch



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I was the world's worst at patient restraint. Somehow, no matter how hard I tried, the patient would continue to struggle or slip out of my grasp. When the doctor would ask for assistance in the exam room and I answered her call, I often saw her shoulders slump when she saw it was me. My coworkers also tended to scold me about "not holding tight enough" or "being too emotional" when I was restraining an animal.

Although I was following the techniques I had been taught on the job (the same ones my coworkers were using), I always seemed to fail. But somewhere in my soul I knew that the way the veterinary community tended to approach restraint wasn't what was best for the animal. Yes, if we had four people holding down a struggling dog for a nail trim, we would end up "getting it done." But what if we could approach the dog in such a way that we didn't need to meet struggling with force? Also, how could we make a cat feel more secure so that it didn't feel the need to scratch, bite, or flee?

Although I kept trying to improve my technique, and tried to become more assertive, I was still seen as the "timid" one when it came to animal restraint.

As a technician, I have always had a deep interest in behavior medicine. Dr. Sophia Yin was one of my professional heroes. I loved her blog and had attended her lectures at conferences, and I hoped to someday intern with her to learn more about applied animal behavior in the veterinary setting. On September 28, 2014, when I heard the terrible news that she died, I signed up for her Low-Stress Handling™ certification course that very day as a way to honor her memory.

As I started the course, I realized…this was it! This was the guidance I needed to be more confident at patient handling! Her low-stress techniques showed me how to use calm control to reduce fear and to eliminate struggling.

I became well versed in multiple towel wraps for cats and how to examine or treat fearful and aggressive cats in the carrier. I learned how to restrain dogs with a myriad of hand and body holds that help them feel safe and secure, which allows us to restrain with minimal force. I also learned how to be flexible and modify restraint techniques and diagnostic procedures to help keep the animal calm. Through this training, I was no longer the "timid" one when it came to restraint. I had new tools to help keep patients relaxed, which allowed us to complete low-stress procedures like nail trims, ear flushes, and blood draws. I was amazed at the difference…both in my ability and in the positive change I saw in our patients' behavior.

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What Moves You?

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"I learned to look at the veterinary experience from the patient's point of view and how to minimize fearful triggers throughout the visit."

—Summer Brooks