

Andrea Harvey, judge and presenter at the Cat Friendly Practice awards.

I've been involved in Cat Friendly Practice since it was first conceived some 18 months ago. Over the next year we sifted and refined a mass of ideas to create the cat friendly practice guide and recorded many of the things which we as cat specialists and enthusiasts do, but had never really committed to paper. We thought about practice attitude and methods of handling cats, equipment and drugs and the care of hospitalised cats, which we used for the guide and which were included on the checklist of things we were looking for in practices.

The judging panel, which comprised FAB representatives, veterinary feline experts, journalists and representatives of the sponsors, Hill's, Direct Line and Pfizer faced many difficult decisions. Some practices provided detailed information on how they were working with cats, others had tantalising glimpses of excellence but didn't quite convince the judges that they should be included on the shortlist to visit.

Suzanne and I got in our little pink car and had just a week to visit the shortlisted practices. Next year if someone would be kind enough to lend us a pink helicopter we could get around the country a lot more quickly! We reported back to the panel with information on the practices' cat friendly facilities and equipment, feline expertise, client and patient care and overall attitude to cats.

We found that there are many individuals and practices recognising the importance of cats and championing their care. It has been a very exciting experience. We were impressed at just how quickly practice staff had taken on board and implemented ideas that they had learned from attending CE days or reading FAB literature.

Here are just five things we learned on our travels:

- 1 You don't have to be cat-only to be cat friendly. Cat-only is fantastic, but not possible for everyone and many small animal and mixed practices are doing an excellent job for cats.
- 2 It's not just about cat-only waiting rooms or feline pheromone products. Attitude (cattitude) and 'thinking cat' can overcome many design, equipment or space limitations.

3 Small things can make a big difference. An impressive number of practices have recognised the importance of a quiet calm approach with minimal restraint and less haste resulting in calmer and happier feline patients, more successful management of cases and fewer feline inflicted injuries.

4 There is more to cat hospitalisation than we thought and a huge variety of cat cages. Feeling safe and warm in a cage can make all the difference to how quickly a cat recovers and there are lots of ways this can be improved.

5 Enthusiastic individuals can make a big difference -but more of this later

There are lots more details on what we learned in the press pack and we will be pulling together our extra tips into an additional booklet to be launched at BSAVA Congress in Birmingham next April for the second year of our Cat Friendly Practice Award Scheme

I will now hand you back to Andy for actual presentations