

Dr Andrew Sparkes, FAB chairman, Cat Friendly Practice awards speech, November 10 - Groucho Club

Welcome to the FAB Cat Friendly Practice awards. We are very excited to be here at this very trendy venue and to see you all here today.

Only 18 months ago **Cat Friendly Practice** was just the germ of an idea based on a desire to raise awareness of the needs of cats in veterinary practice. Our knowledge of cats, their behaviour and how stress can affect them both mentally and physically has increased immensely recently - we wanted to integrate this knowledge into practical advice for vets and nurses working with cats. The idea of **cat friendly practice** was nurtured to fruition with expertise from all over the world, and primarily from members of the FAB feline expert panel. Over the past 7 months since its launch in a blast of pink at BSAVA congress in April, the phrase has taken on a life all of its own and practices have embraced the ideas with enthusiasm.

But why the need for the campaign? Well, veterinary practices were, historically, farm animal orientated (remember those James Herriot programmes), then when companion animal practice became more common, were pretty dog-orientated. Dogs used to outnumber cats, dogs were seen as more important pets because they were more often pedigree animals and because some were working animals. But times have changed, slowly, but with quite dramatic results - pet cats have come to outnumber dogs, people are spending more on their cats and are demanding the best of care for them. Cats require a different thought process and once practices begin to 'think cat' they can become more cat friendly very easily.

We produced brand new literature for the campaign, lead by our practical guide to **Creating a Cat Friendly Practice**, but also including a *Cats Mean Business* leaflet and the dispenser holding nine different leaflets for clients (all available to see on the table). These look at the preparation for a visit to the vet as well as care when back at home afterwards, including advice on giving medication. Mailings to practices and articles in the vet press and with our media partner *Veterinary Times* let practices know what we were up to.

Practices were nominated by clients who responded to a practice poster and nomination forms or to articles in the *FAB Journal* and *Your Cat* magazine, our other media partner.

Well, it has been a fascinating few months and thank you to all the practices which have taken part. We received some brilliant presentations. In a few moments I will hand over to Andrea Harvey who will talk a little bit more about the judging - suffice to say, it wasn't easy!

Andrea, FAB's lecturer in Feline Medicine at Bristol veterinary school and her feline nursing colleague Suzanne Rudd took a week out of their busy schedules to tour the country looking at practices. Nissan was kind enough to lend us a car to match the campaign and the girls certainly got noticed in their pink Micra! In a moment we will find out the results.

This has been a fabulous campaign for the Feline Advisory Bureau. Cats do mean business for practices and many clients expect the highest quality of cat care. We are not professing to know it all - it has definitely been a learning process for us too in seeing what is happening at the sharp end of things - in practice. We learned from veterinary cat specialists and enthusiasts across the globe in producing our booklet; we learned more when we visited practices and we haven't finished

learning yet! In the press pack you will find a list of some of the things we will be adding to our campaign information in an additional booklet which will be launched next year.

As I said earlier, the phrase '**cat friendly practice**' does seem to have a life of its own and already feline veterinary groups working with FAB across Europe are in the process of translating the information to spread the ideas further and wider.

The practices represented here today are clearly 'thinking cat' and are to be congratulated on their great 'cattitude'. There is no going back now!

I going to hand over to Andrea Harvey to tell you a little bit more about the judging and our findings and then to give out the awards. Press packs with all of this information will also be available after the presentation.