

NAVTA Members Speak Out: Benefits of Sedation vs. Manual Restraint

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Dealing with frightened or aggressive animals is often all in a day's work for veterinary technicians. While a bite or scratch is physically uncomfortable, what is often most distressing to us as technicians is that these dogs and cats are stressed and afraid when our goal is to help them feel better.

In February 2015, NAVTA partnered with Zoetis to ask our members about the use of manual restraint and sedation and how it relates to the quality of care your patients receive—as well as to your job satisfaction. We would like to thank the 1,262 of you who participated in the survey. As promised, the results are reported in this article.

Sedation vs. Manual Restraint

On average, respondents are involved in 28 procedures requiring manual restraint or sedation each week with a range of 0 to 100. The survey defined forceful restraint as “physically restraining a dog or cat by one or more technicians without use of sedation for longer than a brief period of time.” Using that description, you reported being asked to forcefully restrain a dog or cat on average 11 times per week, ranging from 0-50 times.

Additionally, 77 percent of you told us that at your practice, sedation is used in less than 50 percent of the procedures where it would be medically appropriate.

Bites Happen

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, veterinary technologists and technicians have a higher rate of injuries and illnesses than the national average. When working with scared or aggressive animals, they may be bitten, scratched or kicked. Injuries typically occur while the technologist or technician is holding, cleaning or restraining an animal.¹

Your input to our survey confirmed this information: 83 percent reporting to have been injured while holding a dog or cat, but only nine percent reporting being injured when an animal was under sedation.

Increasing Sedation = Increasing Satisfaction

Nearly half (45 percent) indicated that you are currently

very satisfied with your job, with 17 percent reporting being extremely satisfied. However, among the 31 percent of the total respondents who said they are somewhat satisfied, some pointed to their practice “not embracing low stress handling” as an area for improvement. In fact, 63 percent of those responding said that increasing sedation would improve their job satisfaction.

You saw sedation instead of manual restraint as beneficial for a number of reasons:

- Less stress on the cat or dog (92%)
- Less stress on me and my coworkers (83%)
- Increased efficiency (67%)
- Improved medical outcomes (51%)

Less Stress for All

You told us that pets who are fearful or reluctant to be examined create a stressful situation not only for themselves, but also for you and for your colleagues. An Executive Summary published in the May 15, 2011, edition of the *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association (JAVMA)* summarizing a Bayer-sponsored “Veterinary Care Usage Study” confirms that the situation is stressful for owners as well.

The study reported: “It became evident that cat owners found taking their animal to the veterinarian highly stressful for the animal and themselves. They indicated that their cats hid when the cat carrier appeared; aggressively, physically resisted being put in the carrier; cried during the car or bus ride to the veterinary clinic; showed signs of stress and fear in the waiting area, particularly when unfamiliar animals, especially dogs, were present; displayed physical signs of tension during the examination; and acted remote and unfriendly for several days after returning home.” The article further reported that 58 percent of cat owners and 38 percent of dog owners stated, “My pet hates to go to the vet.”²

Survey Respondents Said ...

Here are a few of the comments from fellow NAVTA members on why they support sedation protocols:

- “Better patient care. You wouldn't want someone doing that to your pet.”

- “Improves animals’ behavior in the future. They don’t remember anything bad happening if we sedate the first time, and when we keep working with the animal, they sometimes improve to the point where several visits later we no longer need to sedate them.”
- “Less stress on owners.”
- “Better long-term behavioral responses by repeat patients.”
- “It is the right thing to do for the animals.”

You also reported using sedation for a variety of procedures including exploring and repairing painful wounds or lacerations (68 percent); euthanasia (42 percent); exams with fractious animals (41 percent); radiology (40 percent); fracture stabilization (33 percent); and removing foreign bodies (28 percent). Interestingly, you reported that procedure type has more influence on the decision to use sedation than the benefit of sedation itself. When we looked deeper, relieving pain was commonly cited as the other influencer for each procedure.

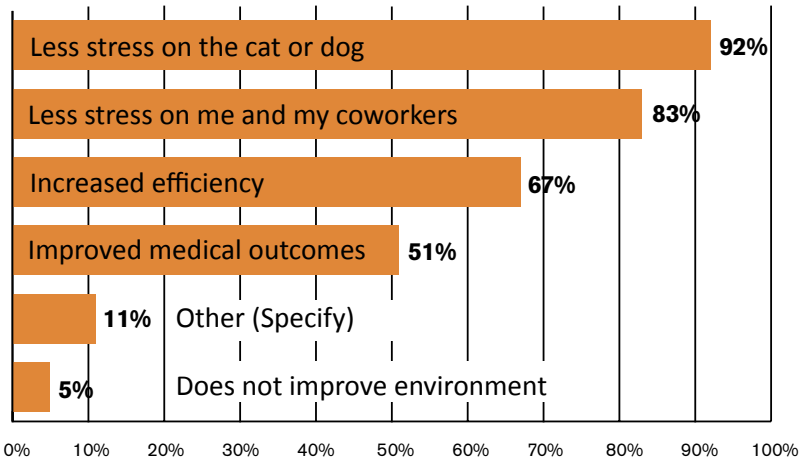
Conclusion

The survey results clearly indicate that there is room for sedation for the fearful and aggressive animals you see each day. As advocates for our veterinary patients’ overall health, you can also be advocates to help improve their experience at your practice. Consider speaking with your veterinarians and other team members about how you can incorporate sedation to help make visits more pleasant for everyone involved—you, your colleagues, clients and, most importantly, the dogs and cats in your care.

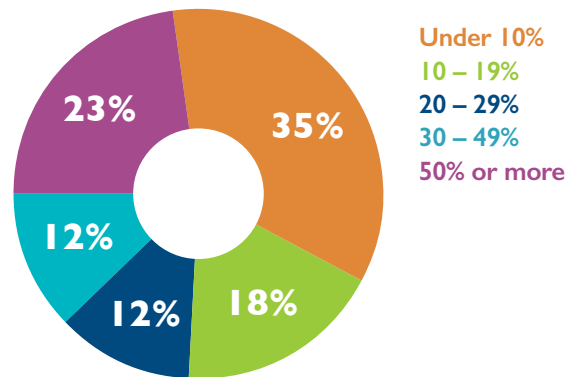
References

1. Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2014-15 Edition, Veterinary Technologists and Technicians. <http://www.bls.gov/ooH/healthcare/veterinary-technologists-and-technicians.htm>. Accessed August 14, 2014.
2. Volk JO, Felsted KE, Thomas JG, Siren CW. Executive summary of Bayer veterinary care usage study. J Am Vet Med Assoc. 2011; 238(10):1275-1282. doi: 10.2460/javma.238.10.1275.

Sedation (Instead of Manual Restraint) Improves the Following



Percentage of Medically Appropriate Procedures Using Sedation



Top Sedation Procedures

