

In conversation with **Calder Vets**

Natalie McQuire, Lead Veterinary Surgeon

Stress and anxiety are caused by many things, and being ill is often one of those times when we feel the need for some calm and relaxation.

Music can ease anxiety and also aid recovery time after a stressful situation¹, but what about for animals? Could music also help during those times when they feel scared and anxious?

We spoke to Lead Veterinary Surgeon at Calder Vets, Natalie McQuire, about the effect music can have on the cats in her care, and how her surgery uses music to help with their recovery.



Natalie McQuire
Lead Veterinary Surgeon

Natalie graduated from the Royal Veterinary College in 2006, and has worked in small animal practice since. This included a year back at the college hospital working with the emergency and critical care team. She started working for Calder vets in 2010 and her current role involves working at the Wakefield and Sandal branches. Natalie obtained an RCVS certificate in veterinary diagnostic imaging in 2012 and has a particular interest in this area.

Calder Vets has a large number of branches across Yorkshire and the north of the country, could you please tell us a little about the background of the practice and how it has grown over the years?

Calder Vets is a long-established veterinary practice covering south and west Yorkshire. Our main hospital is based in Dewsbury and we have 10 additional sites in Leeds, Wakefield, Brighouse, Mirfield, Huddersfield, Penistone, Horbury and Denby Dale. Over the years we have been able to increase the experience and expertise of our team and strive to offer services over and above that of a typical veterinary practice. This includes radiography, CT and MRI and cardiac ultrasound, laparoscopic (keyhole) surgery, advanced dentistry, orthopaedics, on site laboratory. We are a nurse teaching practice which allows us to offer veterinary nursing qualifications with the majority of training on site.

In the practice where you are based at Dewsbury, how many patients are you likely to have in at any one time?

We have space in the hospital for up to 50 patients. This is divided into separate wards for cats, dogs, intensive care cases and other species such as birds, rabbits and the odd injured hedgehog. We have a separate isolation ward for anything that may be infectious for either other animals or the hospital team. We are rarely at full capacity but as a general rule we typically have around 10 to 15 inpatients that need ongoing care for their illness and a further 10-15 day cases for investigations, neutering, dental work or other surgeries.

How long have you worked as a Veterinary Surgeon, and what made you choose this as a profession?

I have been working as a vet for the last 16 years. Time seems to have flown and it certainly does not feel that long! There was never any other profession I considered, and I wanted to be a vet for as long as I can remember. My parents still have a photo of me when I was about 4 years old trying to use a toy stethoscope on my cat.



We have read the article from 2018² where the practice spoke about how they have been using music for inpatient cats, how did the use of music for animal recovery come about?

Published research³ has demonstrated that playing cat-specific music significantly reduces stress levels in our feline patients. This has huge benefits on their wellbeing and the additional bonus of allowing vets to conduct better examinations.

What physical or psychological changes did you notice in the cats when music was played? Is there a particular genre that has a more beneficial effect? Or even a particular track that seems to be most popular?

We use an online streaming service to obtain the cat music, so have no control over quite what is played although the music tends to have quite a classical bias. It does make it a little difficult to ascertain whether a particular track or genre is preferred by the cats. I would say that the music seems to have a calming effect on our human team members too. We can often find someone hiding out in the lovely calm atmosphere of the cat ward while writing up their clinical notes.

Is it just cats that you have noticed react positively to the playing of music, or do you have other inpatients who it helps to calm? How about dogs?

We do use music in our dog wards but I believe there is less evidence to support this. Studies have shown dogs have slightly more varied music taste and may prefer classical, reggae or soft rock.



What does a positive reaction look like for other animals? How does this differ to cats?

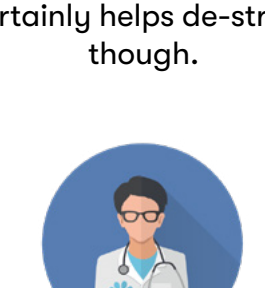
I feel there is just a general sense of calm for everyone. Patients are happier being handled for examinations and interacting with the team. They may not show the high heart rates we sometimes see when they are stressed. They are more co-operative when it comes to obtaining blood samples or placing intravenous cannulas. They may also spend more time lying down and resting rather than standing.

How does a visit to the vet impact an animal's senses? (e.g. sight, smell). What role does music play in this?

We have a bit of a mixed response from our patients. Some totally love us and are pulling to get through the door. Others show quite a bit of fear or even aggression. I suspect quite a bit is related to the smell of the vets as pets seem to know where they are even if they have used a different vet previously and this is their first visit to Calder Vets. Animals rely much more on pheromones which we are unable to smell, so if a stressed pet had been in the building before them, it may have released stress pheromones which another will pick up on. Hopefully if the music can reduce stress in one patient and reduce the release of stress pheromones it may reduce stress in others through the day too!

A visit to the vets can be daunting for both the animals and their owners, do you play music or the TV in waiting areas for pets and their owners to help keep the area relaxed? Have you found music to have a positive impact on owners?

I have never actually asked the owners regarding their opinions on waiting room music. I guess as our preferences are so diverse it is difficult to find something that suits everyone. The calming music we play patients certainly helps de-stress the team though.

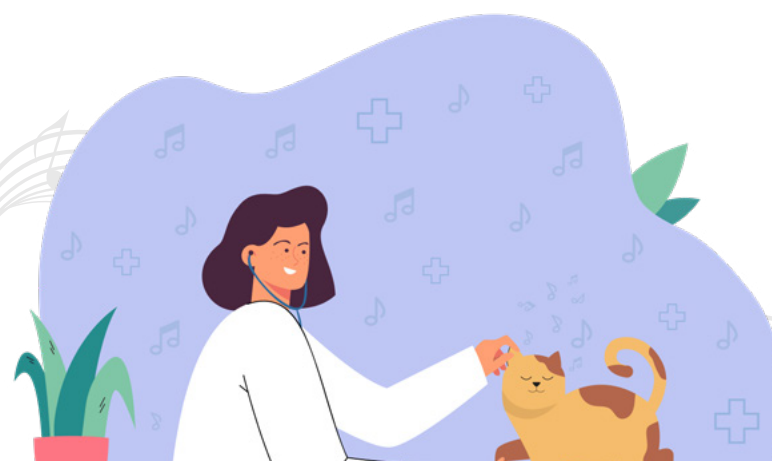


What other tools do you use to help to relieve the stress and anxiety in the animals while they are staying with you?

All cats have a 'hide' where they can tuck themselves away. This helps them feel more secure while in the kennel. We also have plug in pheromone diffusers in both wards and consult rooms which can help reassure our patients.

Finally, if you were asked by another vet about using music within the practice, what advice would you give?

I would recommend its use both in the waiting room and wards. It does need to be tailored to our patients and cat/dog specific though. Just having the radio on will not help them.



We have spoken to both cat and dog specialists about the effect music can have, how owners and those responsible for pet care can use music to ease issues such as separation anxiety and scared and frightened pets on bonfire night.

A visit to the vets can be a stressful situation for all animals and music can be a welcome distraction for both the animal and the anxious owner. Playing music or the TV in waiting areas, recovery rooms and, where appropriate in treatment rooms could help to make a visit to the vets more enjoyable. If you would like to find out more about the benefits of playing music in your vets or other animal wellbeing business, please visit:

pplprs.co.uk/themusiclicence/sectors/veterinary-animal-services/