

## Tips for Accommodating an Assistance Dog Team

In the November/December 2011 issue of *Today's Veterinary Practice*, the article **Making a Difference...One Assistance Dog at a Time: An Interview with Dr. Anita Migday** (page 96) mentioned the availability of the following tips on the *TVP* website. To read the full article, select **Back Issues** from the top navigation bar on the homepage; then choose the issue from the list.

### Arrival & Reception

Treating an assistance dog team starts in the parking lot.

- Access is the key—whether it is a parking area with sufficient room for egress from the vehicle or a wheelchair accessible ramp to your clinic door.
- Having the client call when they are on their way can give a technician time to greet them at their car and expedite the arrival process.
- Common courtesies, such as holding heavy doors open and removing obstacles, mean a lot.
- Prepare the examination room by removing chairs and positioning examination tables to provide as much floor space as possible.

### In the Examination Room

As you listen (and hear) the story of what tasks the dog does in daily life, you will be able to assess where you need to focus your examination.

- A dog that puts miles on its paws on city streets/public transit may need to have its feet trimmed of excess hair that inevitably has bubble gum or tar trapped in it.
- Slip off the harness and check for chafing or pressure sores.
- If you need to do something uncomfortable to the dog, move and speak slowly, avoid rough movements, give a cookie, and keep the client occupied by telling your own story so they are not concerned about the pain or discomfort the dog is feeling. Take a break if needed to let the dog settle during this time.
- Clients are always concerned about their dogs' weight since exercising their dog may be extremely difficult. Discuss options, such as new low-calorie treats and environmental enrichment.
- Preventive medical plans should include noncore vaccines, such as those for canine influenza and kennel cough, due to the high exposure these dogs face in public places.
- Finally, be generous and frequent with your compliments! A disabled human partner has to work extra hard for things that we would do easily, such as keep a nose clean from breakfast or maintain tidy ears.