

Dr. Patrick Melese DVM, Dip ACVB (Behavior)
Veterinary Behavior Consultants

Dear Colleague:

Thank you for your request for referral supplies to help clients obtain specialty veterinary behavioral medicine services. For over 20 years now **Veterinary Behavior Consultants (VBC)** has been seeing clients with companion animal behavior problems that are referred to us by their family veterinarian. With VBC you can confidently refer your clients to local, professional, state-of-the-art behavior services provided by a Board-certified specialist who understands all aspects of pet health, as well as the importance of you, the primary care veterinarian. To that end, I've enclosed some new client educational material to make it easy to share information about our behavior services with your clients who may need us.

With 13 years of general practice (including hospital ownership) under my belt prior to restricting my practice to behavior problems, I understand how important it is to provide ethical, private referral services to my veterinary community. That's why I **strongly encourage direct referral from a client's family veterinarian**. However, even if the veterinarian does not directly refer a client, we send a referral summary letter to any identified primary care provider after the appointment.

Veterinarian specialists in Behavioral Medicine are unique among animal behavior practitioners. There are just over 40 practicing board-certified veterinary behavior specialists currently in North America and, up to just recently when a new candidate in LA passed her boards, I have been the only one in private practice here in Southern California.

Only **veterinary behaviorists are licensed** and required by law to uphold practice standards and are supervised by various professional organizations. Only veterinarians are *required* to present their expertise as behaviorists appropriately and cannot *ethically* claim to be a behaviorist or specialize in behavior unless they are board-certified under AVMA guidelines. Furthermore veterinary behavior specialists have the knowledge base to understand and appropriately recommend and prescribe psychotropic medications when indicated. Our practice adheres to the highest professional standards with humane, cutting edge, effective, high quality and ethically presented services.

As in other veterinary specialties, clients must make an appointment to see (or speak to) the doctor but I am happy to speak to referring doctors about their cases. Our professional fees are comparable to those charged by other boarded veterinary behavior specialists in private practice. Clients with internet access should be directed to the VBC website (**www.sdvvetbehavior.com**) to educate themselves further about our behavior practice, professional fees and the specific services we offer, and to download the appropriate intake forms required prior to an appointment. Clients will then call the office at **858-259-6115** to schedule an appointment where they may be asked to leave a message if an appointment scheduler is not immediately available.

I appreciate your ongoing support to be able to run a practice dedicated to clinical behavioral medicine and look forward to continuing to help you and your clients with their pet's behavior problems. Please feel free to call with any questions you may have. We would appreciate a call from your staff to request more educational information (business cards, brochure insert, referral forms, etc.) as you need it but please note that clinic information and forms are also available on the website.

Sincerely,

Patrick Melese MA, DVM, DACVB (Behavior)
and the staff of the Veterinary Behavior Consultants.

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BEHAVIOR PATIENT REFERRAL



This will introduce my client: _____
and patient named: _____
Referred by Dr.: _____
Practice: _____
Address: _____
City: _____
Phone Number: _____ Date: _____
Fax number: _____ e-mail: _____

Doctor: Please give a brief history of the case you are referring including duration of problem, relevant signs observed, observations, laboratory results, radiographic results, significant treatments received, diet, etc.

Suggestions and comments (if any) by Referring Veterinarian:

Dr. Melese is seeing cases only through his private practice by appointment at the Animal Specialty Group in San Diego and selected cases by housecall.

Please have client go to website then call the behavior office for an appointment: **Tel: (858) 259-6115**

After Dr. Melese sees your case he will FAX a letter summarizing findings and plans.

Please let us know if you would also like Dr. Melese to call you after he sees your patient or feel free to call to discuss your case before or after the behavioral specialty appointment.

Thank you allowing me to help your client and patient with specialty behavioral services.

Veterinary Behavior Consultants
5610 Kearny Mesa Rd. Suite B; San Diego, CA 92111
Tel: 858-259-6115 FAX: 858-259-0013 E-mail: info@sdvetbehavior.com Web: sdvetbehavior.com

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GUIDELINES FOR REFERRAL OF DOG AND CAT BEHAVIOR CASES

{Please note current referral telephone number : 858-259-6115 }

I. **Evaluate** for possible behavior problem **including** but not limited to:

- ❖ **Aggressive behavior** (including "just growling"),
- ❖ **Destructive** behavior in cats and dogs (chewing/scratching/digging, etc.),
- ❖ **Elimination** disorders (housebreaking mistakes, litterbox problems),
- ❖ **Feeding** disorders (e.g. pica, coprophagy),
- ❖ **Excessive vocalization**, barking & **Stereotypic/Compulsive** disorders

II. **Counsel clients** on availability of a behavioral referral and that professional specialty fees are charged as with other specialty practices. Emphasize we usually have good success for clients who are motivated to solve the problem but there are seldom "quick fixes". Behavior problem diagnosis, treatment and prognosis will be part of consultation so **we do not provide no-charge "quick ideas" for clients over the phone** just as we do not diagnose and recommend medical and surgical treatment without seeing the patient and evaluating the problem with an office call (that would also be against practice act). Behavior services are **by appointment only** but *clients can now view more information prior to booking an appointment (if they wish) on our new website: www.sdvvetbehavior.com*. Office calls are usually initiated with a visit lasting 2-3.5 hrs (average 2.75 hrs) with follow-up consults scheduled as needed to accomplish and follow the treatment plan. **It goes without saying that prescription drugs cannot be recommended or prescribed without a behavior work up of the patient, and prescribing clinician having a current Dr./owner/patient relationship.**

SERVICE FEE LIST

January 2010 (fees subject to change without notice)

OFFICE CALLS:¹	\$155 /hour- with 1.5 hr. minimum ("mini" @ \$275) (typically 2.5-3 hrs initial visit but occasionally longer)
rechecks (within 1-12 wks)	\$159 and are typically 45-55 minutes routinely.
HOUSE CALLS:	\$200/hour ; (\$500 consult minimum). (average 3 hrs initial visit)+ travel fees apply
PHONE CONSULTS: (<u>only</u> for follow-up appnts.)	st 1 15 min: \$95 (very brief-rarely this short !) up to 30 min: \$115 ("short") 30-55 min \$159 (routine)

• Have clients go to web site then call **858-259-6115** where VBC staff will schedule them to see a behavioral clinician. ***If possible, main people involved with pet should be available at time of consultation. Please fax (858-259-0013), e-mail or copy and send with owner any RELEVANT medical/drug history/records-summarize if possible (also see patient referral form).***

• Brief referral letters summarizing findings and treatment plan are routinely Faxed after the appointment. Please indicate to me ***if you also wish to be called after seeing*** cases that you refer to my behavior service.

¹ Clinic hours Monday through Thursday 9-5 but limited after-hours appointments can sometimes be made for additional fees.

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Clinical Behavior Service

General information

Q: *What exactly is Applied Animal Behavior?*

A: The profession of Applied Animal Behavior is a relatively new field (30-35 years) made up of veterinarians, psychologists, and other professionals with advanced degrees in animal behavior and other behavioral and biological sciences. We specialize in applying scientific principles learned from the study of behaviors in the wild (Ethology), psychological Learning Theory, and counseling skills to help people deal with their pet's behavior problems. Humane methods, often involving various behavior modification techniques and sometimes medications, are used to help the owner solve the behavior problems. Only veterinarians who see behavior cases can legally prescribe behavioral medications (along with other important behavior modification tools) that may help many behavior problems in your pets. *Veterinary Behaviorists* (term reserved for board-certified diplomates of the American College of Veterinary Behaviorists) have the additional benefit of specific training in psychopharmacology and the medical aspects of your pet's health and how this affects behavior.

Q: *What are some examples of behavior problems in dogs and cats that are treated?*

A: Common behavior problems for **dogs** include **aggression, barking, destructiveness, fears and anxieties, digging, housesoiling, jumping-up, compulsive problems, ingestion of inappropriate objects, eating disorders, and unruliness** as some examples. For **cats**, **housesoiling, spraying, scratching, aggression, excessive grooming, fighting, suckling and kneading** are common problems. These are just a few of the many behavioral problems treated in cats and dogs.

Q: *What typically happens during a behavior consultation?*

A: During an appointment Dr. Melese meets with the family and pet(s) either at his veterinary office (Animal Specialty Group facility in Kearny Mesa) or by housecall. There the doctor obtains a thorough history of the behavior problems (e.g., at what age did it start, how did it progress, when does it occur and with whom, etc.). The doctor also evaluates the pet(s) as appropriate and arrives at a behavioral diagnosis. The final phase of the consultation involves developing a treatment plan and explaining it to the family. The doctor then discusses the plan with the family and, as appropriate, will demonstrate how to carry it out, provide handouts, and recommend behavioral aids and follow-up help. A referral letter summarizing behavioral findings and plan is later sent to the family veterinarian, if identified by the owner (most cases are referred by general practice veterinarians). The techniques, procedures and medications (if any are indicated) used are as safe, humane and effective as possible. The prognosis for success is also discussed at this time if appropriate. Note that it is the pet's owners who are responsible for carrying out the treatment plan. Ultimately, only the people living with the pet can effectively change an unwanted behavior.

Q: *What are the doctor's credentials for treating behavior cases?*

A: Dr. Patrick Melese is a board-certified Veterinary Behaviorist. He is a diplomate of the *American College of Veterinary Behaviorists* and former founder and head clinician of the behavior program satellite of the University of California School of Veterinary Medicine. Dr. Melese is currently one of only 2 board-certified Veterinary Behaviorist in private specialty practice in all of Southern California. Candidates for Board Certification must already be experienced both in general medicine and surgery, as well as specifically have advanced training and experience in clinical animal behavior. They must have substantial experience and possess very specific qualifications before being allowed to take an extensive set of examinations. Once the examinations have been passed, the veterinarian is then allowed to be admitted to the American College of Veterinary Behaviorists as a diplomate.

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Dr. Melese brings 20 years of experience with behavior cases here in San Diego, along with cutting-edge material from the global field of Applied Animal Behavior, to your pet's specific behavior problem and works with your family veterinarian, as needed, to help you solve the problem.

Q: *What services are offered and what is the charge?*

A: Dr. Melese meets with his clients and their pets by appointment only. These meetings are in his San Diego office, or, in some cases, in the client's home. As is the case with other professional medical specialists, the Doctor's fees are determined by the time spent applying his expertise toward finding a solution to each person's problem. Fees are charged as an hourly rate, and the amount of time required varies from case to case. The initial visits typically last between 2.5-3.5 hours. In the majority of cases, one consultation is sufficient to work up, diagnose and initiate a treatment plan that includes teaching the owners how to solve their pet's problems. However, since most behavioral problems are of a chronic nature, follow-up consultations are important for successful long-term changes and to assist the family as they continue to learn and carry out the treatment plan. If medications are part of the treatment plan, follow-up visits are legally required to monitor and continue that aspect of treatment. To be successful, pet owners should be ready to invest some time and financial resources to solve their problems, just as would be the case for medical or surgical problems the pet may have. Specific hourly fees can be found on our website and questions should be discussed with the staff member when making your appointment to see Dr. Melese. Starting in 2009 we now accept VISA, M/C and Discover in order to help pet owners promptly get their pets the help they need during this challenging economic climate.

Q: *How successful is Dr. Melese in helping owners solve behavior problems?*

A: If the pet's owners are motivated, capable, and have a reasonably workable schedule, the vast majority of behavior problems can be improved effectively with Dr. Melese's help. Success depends heavily on the people carrying out treatment plans (compliance of owners) and on the individual pet and problem. The prognosis for your pet should be discussed with the doctor at the time of the consultation when the case has been evaluated, and again during the prescribed recheck exams as indicated.

Q: *Does Dr. Melese see pets other than cats and dogs?*

A: Yes. Although cats and dogs currently make up the majority of the behavioral practice, Dr. Melese also sees cases involving pet birds, rodents and rabbits and other animals and has consulted on equine and zoological animal cases as well.

Q: *How do I schedule an appointment with Dr. Patrick Melese?*

A: Pet owners can also view additional information about behavior services and expedite scheduling an appointment at our website www.sdvetbehavior.com. To make an appointment please call **858-259-6115** and leave a message. A staff member will generally call you back later that business day M-F (in some cases call backs may take up to 24 business hours if the service is very busy) to make an appointment for you and answer questions you may have about the consulting services. Dr. Melese's schedule does not allow him to come to the phone to speak directly to pet owners prior to an appointment but numerous testimonials from past and existing clients are posted on the website. It is also inappropriate to give diagnostic, treatment or prognostic advice without a valid doctor/client/patient relationship established during the appointment. Your veterinarian can call and speak to Dr. Melese directly if needed prior to your appointment.