

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 30 years now **Veterinary Behavior Consultants (VBC)** has been seeing clients with companion animal behavior problems that are referred to us by their family veterinarian in Southern California. With VBC you can confidently refer your clients to local, professional, state-of-the-art behavior services provided (and/or supervised) by an experienced specialist clinician who understands all aspects of pet health, as well as the importance of you, the primary care veterinarian. To that end, we have enclosed some new client educational material to make it easy to share information about our behavior services with your clients who may need us. We are still **offering TELEMEDICINE** appointments along with brief “curbside exams” as required by law but have started to offer some clinic/office appointments on selected clinic days with our ACVB resident Dr. Crystal Steib at a Bay Park area clinic.

With over 13 years of general practice each (including hospital ownership) under our belts, we understand how important it is to provide ethical, private referral services to my veterinary community. That’s why we **strongly encourage direct referral from a client’s family veterinarian**. However, even if the veterinarian does not directly refer a client, we send a visit summary letter to any identified primary care provider after the appointment as a courtesy.

Veterinarian specialists in Behavioral Medicine are unique among animal behavior practitioners and for almost 20 years, Dr. Melese was the only one in private practice in Southern California. Veterinary Behavior Consultants is still the only such specialty service based in San Diego County.

Only **Veterinary Behaviorists are licensed**, 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, like other specialties, cannot *ethically* claim to be a behaviorist or specialize in behavior unless they are board-certified under AVMA guidelines. Furthermore, veterinary behavior specialists (aka “Veterinary Psychiatrists”) have the knowledge to understand, appropriately recommend and prescribe psychotropic medications when indicated, which when appropriate and used along with a comprehensive treatment plan, can dramatically improve outcome of pets’ serious behavioral presentations. 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) our clinicians, but we are happy to speak to referring doctors (peer to peer only please) about their referred patients. Our professional fees are comparable to those charged by other boarded veterinary behavior specialists in private practice. Clients should be directed to the VBC website (www.sdvbehavior.com) to educate themselves further and to find professional fees & policies, FAQs, intake forms to download, complete and e-mail or fax back prior to an appointment. Due to limited availability and overwhelming demand for new patient appointments in the last few years, we are often scheduling out several weeks to several months.

We appreciate your ongoing support to be able to run a private specialty practice so that it can be dedicated to clinical behavioral medicine, and we 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 and check our website for practice referral info updates and the most current referral guides and pricing. Please reach out to us to request more educational information (business cards, brochure insert, referral forms, etc.) as you need them but please note that current versions of our **clinic information and forms are also available on our website for referring practices** (www.sdvbehavior.com).

Sincerely,

Patrick Melese MA, DVM, DACVB (Behavior)

Crystal Steib DVM (ACVB Resident clinician- Behavior)

Veterinary Behavior Consultants
San Diego, CA

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 referral telephone number: 858-259-6115}

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

- ❖ **Aggressive behavior** (including "just growling"),
- ❖ **Anxiety/phobias/excessively fearful, etc.**
- ❖ **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 typically have good success for clients who are motivated to solve the problem ("teamwork with pet parent") 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 examining the patient and working up the problem during an appointment (that would also be against practice act). *Clients can access all the intake forms, fees, FAQs and other information prior to booking an appointment on our website: www.sdvvetbehavior.com.* New patients begin with an extended initial telemedicine appointment/"curbside exam" (time varies but initial visit is typically 2.5-3+ 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 the prescribing clinician having a current legal VCPR established "in person" by actually seeing the patient/client.**

SERVICE FEE LIST

Jan 2025 (fees subject to change without notice see website for latest pricing)

Telemed/office CALLS:¹	\$990 up to 3 hrs. but many can be longer & prorated
Additional involved pet	\$200
Rechecks (within 1-12 wks.)	\$260 and are typically 40-45 minutes routinely.
HOUSE CALLS (or ER requests):	\$450/hour; (\$1,350 minimum) + travel fees
PHONE Recheck CONSULTS:	up to 30 min: \$220 ("short")
(<u>Only</u> for follow-up appts.)	30-50 min \$260 (routine- most cases need this)

- Please have clients **go to our web site**, download, complete & e-mail back 6-page signed client intake forms then contact our office (ideally via e-mail during pandemic) where VBC staff will have them make their \$300 non-refundable scheduling fee/deposit (we have too much demand to hold a 3-hr slot for them without firm \$ commitment) then schedule them to see a behavioral clinician. **Please e-mail (preferred) or, fax (858-259-0013) any RELEVANT medical/drug history/records-summarize if possible (see patient referral form).**
- Visit summary report is routinely sent by e-mail after the initial appointment.

¹ Clinic hours Monday through Wednesday 9-5 but limited after-hours appointments (ER requests) can sometimes be made for **additional** fees.

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BEHAVIOR PATIENT REFERRAL



This will introduce my client: _____	
& patient named/pet type: _____ / _____	
Referred by Dr.: _____	
Practice: _____	
Address: _____	
City: _____	
Practice Phone: _____	Date: _____
Practice E-mail: _____	Fax: _____

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 (including any behavioral medication dosing details), diet, etc.

Suggestions and comments (if any) by Referring Veterinarian:

Although our specialist clinician has mainly been seeing cases by TELEMEDICINE appointments in San Diego during PANDEMIC (with “curbside exam” as legally required at initial appointment and at least yearly), we have again started to offer limited clinic appointments at our resident’s Bay Park practice.

Please have client go to website then contact behavior office for an appointment (info@sdvetbehavior.com). Note that we will **not** contact your client as they must reach out to us in order to make an appointment.

After a behavior clinician sees your case, we will e-mail a report summarizing findings & plans.

Please check one option below (default will be option 1 if no checks)

- 1. The e-mail will be sufficient; I will call peer to peer if I have any further questions:**
- 2. Please also have clinician call me after this referred case is seen:**

Please feel free to call & briefly discuss your case before or after the specialty appointment if needed.

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

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Clinical Behavior Service

General information

Q: *What exactly is Applied Animal Behavior?*

A: The profession of Applied Animal Behavior is now well over 45 years old and made up of specialist veterinarians, psychologists, and other professionals with advanced graduate degrees in animal behavior and other behavioral and biological sciences. Unfortunately, in the last decade or so, people with minimal to no actual formal degree credentials (may not even have completed high school) have begun to represent themselves as “behaviorists” as a “marketing” term greatly confusing the pet community. Actual Applied Animal Behaviorists and Veterinary Behaviorists have advanced formal degrees & 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 even medications (if provider is a licensed veterinarian), 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 treatment plan components) that may help many behavior problems in your pets and general practice veterinarians should NEVER prescribe or dispense any medication based on a layman (e.g., non-veterinarian) advice/prescription. *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 the 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, phobias & anxieties, digging, house-soiling, jumping-up, compulsive problems, ingestion of inappropriate objects, eating disorders, and unruliness** as some examples. For **cats**, **house-soiling, marking, scratching, aggression, excessive grooming, fighting, suckling and kneading** are common behavior problems. These are just a few of the many behavioral problems treated in cats and dogs.

Q: *What happens during a behavior consultation with Veterinary Behavior Consultants (VBC)?*

A: During an appointment, a VBC clinician meets with the family and pet(s) **CURRENTLY EITHER VIA TELEMEDICINE WITH A LEGALLY REQUIRED BRIEF “CURBSIDE EXAM” IN FRONT OF THE DOCTOR’S HOME IN CARMEL VALLEY OR AT A CLINIC APPOINTMENT in Bay Park**. At the appointment, doctor obtains a thorough history of the behavior problems (e.g., where did they get the pet, at what age did problem(s) start, how did they 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 answers their questions as time permits, following up with some handouts, and recommends behavioral aids, behavioral medication as appropriate and follow-up help. A visit summary outlining behavioral findings and plan is later e-mailed 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 as appropriate. Note that it is the pet owners who are responsible for carrying out the treatment plan in the vast majority of cases. Ultimately, only the people living with the pet (with our help) can effectively change an unwanted behavior(s).

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

A: Dr. Patrick Melese is a board-certified Veterinary Behaviorist (aka “Veterinary Psychiatrist”). He is a diplomate of the *American College of Veterinary Behaviorists* and former founder and head clinician of the Behavior Program San Diego satellite of the University of California School of Veterinary Medicine, which is now in Sorrento Valley. Dr. Melese is currently one of the very few board-certified Veterinary Behaviorists in private specialty practice in all of Southern California and still the only one based in San Diego. Our resident Dr. Crystal Steib has owned and operated her own private practice in San Diego for many years and is pursuing an approved ACVB residency with Dr. Melese as her mentor. 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 and other substantial requirement have been met, the veterinarian applicant is then allowed to be admitted to the American College of Veterinary Behaviorists as a Diplomate. We provide continuing education presentations to the local, national and international veterinary community, helps teach senior veterinary students from

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regional and international veterinary schools, trains resident clinicians and participates in clinical research and publications including being a contributing author for the popular “Decoding Your Dog” book on dog behavior. Dr. Melese is also regularly retained as an expert witness in animal-related superior and federal legal cases and performs behavioral assessments on animals for a variety of purposes. We bring over 30 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 behavioral problem(s). Resident clinicians (in training program registered with the American College of Veterinary Behaviorists) may also participate with the care of the patient as in other specialty services.

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

A: 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 the pet’s behavior problem(s). The new patient appointments typically last between 2.5-3.5 hrs. depending on the duration and complexity of the behavior issues and cases that require more than our standard “new patient” allocation are charged a pro-rated additional fee. Cases that have more than 1 patient (e.g., two fighting household pets where both pets actively participate in fights) will incur an additional fee for the second patient. In the majority of cases, one consultation is sufficient to work up, diagnose and initiate a comprehensive treatment plan that includes teaching the owners how to begin to solve their pet’s problems. However, since most behavioral problems are complex and have taken a while to develop, 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 professional fees can be found on our website & any questions should be discussed with the staff member when making your appointment to see a VBC clinician (BEFORE THE APPOINTMENT!).

Q: How successful are our doctors 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 a **Veterinary Behavior Consultants** clinician’s help. Success depends heavily on the people carrying out treatment plans (compliance of “pet parents” like with pediatric psychology/psychiatry) and on the individual pet and problem. Thankfully, our ability to help clients/patient has remained consistent even through the telemedicine/“curbside exam” model that has been required during this pandemic. The prognosis for the pet should be discussed with the clinician at the time of the consultation after the case has been evaluated, and again updated during the prescribed recheck exams as appropriate since it greatly depends on what the clients can/will do and how the patient responds to treatment components since each pet is unique.

Q: Do VBC clinicians see animals other than cats and dogs?

A: Yes. Although cats and dogs currently make up the vast majority of the behavioral practice, our clinicians sometimes also see cases involving horses, pet birds, rodents and rabbits and other animals (even the occasional pet pig) and may consult on zoological animal cases as well. However, the vast majority of cases are cats and dogs these days.

Q: How do I schedule an appointment with a VBC clinician?

A: On our website www.sdvetbehavior.com pet owners can view information about services, current fees, download, complete/sign & e-mail back the multi-page client intake forms and then contact us by e-mail or calling **858-259-6115** to schedule a new patient appointment. We now also require a NON-REFUNDABLE scheduling fee/deposit of \$300 to ensure we only hold extended new-patient slots for committed pet owners since demand for new patient appointments has been so heavy. Our clinician’s busy schedules **do not** allow them 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 *not* appropriate to give diagnostic, treatment or prognostic advice without a valid doctor/client/patient relationship established during the appointment. However, your primary veterinarian can e-mail or call and briefly speak (“peer to peer” only please) to a VBC clinician directly if needed prior to your appointment.

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