

Dog Friendly Practice – Referring Vet Information

In order to get the most out of a referral visit without unnecessary stress for our patients, sedation or anxiolysis may be beneficial. For healthy patients a number of options exist. However, some of these drugs are used off licence in dogs and cats, which should be discussed with owners beforehand. It is advisable to perform a medication trial prior to the date of appointment to assess the effect and see if further sedation is required. A separate 'Advice for Owners' sheet to provide general advice on managing anxious patients is available online which owners can be directed to.

Please be aware that the following is intended as general advice and does not replace a clinical assessment by the referring veterinarian. Many of the included drugs are used off licence in veterinary patients, which should be communicated to owners prior to prescription. If you are referring an unwell patient, or a complex case, please contact our Anderson Moores client care team. Your query will be passed on to our Anaesthesia team who will be happy to provide more specific advice on appropriate medications to prescribe.

Cats

- Pregabalin is a licensed medication for anxiety associated with travel and vet visits, with a flavoured solution available (Bonqat®), given 1-2 hours prior to appointment
- Gabapentin is an unlicensed alternative
- The peak effect can vary between cats, so should be determined using a test dose
- An addition of trazodone could be considered if inadequate sedation is seen

Dogs

- Trazodone is typically the first line choice, given 1-2 hours prior to referral, however this is not a licensed medication so should be used if licensed options are not suitable
- If this is insufficient when tested, or for aggressive dogs, gabapentin can be added
- Licensed options include tasipimidine (Tessie) and orotransmucosal dexmedetomidine (Sileo)

Trazodone

Trazodone is often used as a first line anxiolytic drug in dogs for veterinary visits. In aggressive dogs, the higher end of the dosing range is more likely to be needed, while the lower end will often suffice for anxious but friendly dogs. Trazodone can be used in cats, but gabapentin is often a preferable alternative.

Action: Serotonin antagonist and reuptake inhibitor.

Dose: 5-10mg/kg, given orally 1-2 hours prior to appointment/travel

Contraindications: **Not licensed.** Avoid if the patient is receiving other serotonin-influencing drugs such as fluoxetine. Do not combine with monoamine oxidase inhibitors. Avoid if significant liver disease or seizures. This drug is not licenced in companion animals. Avoid in pregnancy and animals under 6 months old.

Gabapentin & Pregabalin

Gabapentin is typically used as a first line in cats for veterinary visits, with a number of studies showing its safe and effective use, however it is not licensed in cats. It can also be added as a second line agent in dogs. Bonquat (pregabalin) is a licensed alternative for cats and should be considered if appropriate.

Action: Binds to voltage-activated calcium channels, reducing the release of excitatory neurotransmitters

Dose of gabapentin: For cats, start at 10mg/kg, can increase to 20mg/kg if insufficient. Can be added alongside trazodone in dogs at 10-20mg/kg. Give 2 hours prior to appointment/travel. An additional dose given the night prior to an appointment can increase effect.

Dose of pregabalin: a dosing syringe is provided based on weight.

Contraindications: **Gabapentin is not licensed.** Reduce dose (e.g half dose) or avoid in renal disease. Can cause ataxia, hypersalivation and vomiting. This drug is not licenced in companion animals. Avoid in pregnancy.

Alprazolam

Alprazolam is a benzodiazepine which can be used for anxiolytic and sedative effects. It also provides an amnesic effect, which can reduce negative conditioning in patients. A paradoxical excitation and disinhibition may be seen, meaning a test dose is essential and owners must be warned about possible aggressive behaviour. For this reason, it is rarely used as a first line medication.

Action: Act at benzodiazepine receptor on GABA_A channels, increasing binding of inhibitory neurotransmitter GABA

Dose: 0.01-0.1mg/kg orally, given 1 hour prior to stressful event. An initial test dose at the lower end of the dosing interval is advisable.

Contraindications: **Not licensed.** Hepatic/renal disease and pregnancy. Can cause excitation. Do not administer with carbonic anhydrase inhibitors, cimetidine, itraconazole or behavioural medications such as fluoxetine. This drug is not licensed in companion animals.

Dexmedetomidine (Sileo)

This product can be used in systemically healthy animals for stressful events, giving moderate to profound sedation. For this reason, it will interfere with clinical examinations so should only be used in very aggressive animals where conscious examination won't be possible. Please contact the service you are referring to prior to giving this medication to confirm that it won't affect your patient's management. Additionally, testing the effect of the drug prior to referral in a controlled environment is advisable.

Action: Alpha-2 receptor agonist

Dose: dose according to data sheet (gel) for profound sedation, transmucosal

Contraindications: Cardiac disease, moderate to severe hepatic/renal disease, respiratory distress, suspected intracranial disease, moderate to severe anaemia, systemically unwell patients, pregnancy. This product will give profound sedation which may interfere with clinical examinations.

Additional notes: This drug will influence the results of echocardiography. Please avoid in cardiology referrals.

Tasipimidine (Tessie)

This product can be used in systemically healthy animals for stressful events, giving moderate sedation. This could affect some aspects of a clinical exam, so please contact the service you are referring to prior to giving this medication to confirm that it won't affect your patient's management. Additionally, testing the effect of the drug prior to referral in a controlled environment is advisable.

Action: Alpha-2 receptor agonist

Dose: 0.1ml/kg (30mcg/kg) orally

Contraindications: Cardiac disease, moderate to severe hepatic/renal disease, respiratory distress, suspected intracranial disease, moderate to severe anaemia, systemically unwell patients, pregnancy.

Additional notes: This drug will influence the results of echocardiography. Please avoid in cardiology referrals.