

It has everything to do with the treatment that has to be offered to ensure the optimal effect from a course of prescribed medication. How does your practice maintain this at the same level of importance in the owner's mind as when they made the appointment and at the time of their entry to the practice on the day they saw you for a consultation?

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We are creatures of habit, routines and rituals. Most of us have daily habits and routines which are reported to constitute, in combination, over 70 % of our daily activity, 40 per cent being habits.² These activities are automatic and are the behavioural patterns which are literally etched in our neural pathways. The good news is that through repetition, it is possible to form new habits, including the administration of medication. The key elements required are:



- A cue
- A routine
- A reward

Why do we do this?

Habits and routines stabilise our behaviour. They allow us to act efficiently and to concentrate on the tasks upon which we choose to focus. There is a sense of security and reassurance in doing the same things, in the same order, on a daily basis. This is especially noticeable as we get older. For example, my mother, aged 79, drives inordinate distances to go to shops and services, such as the optician, which she has used for over 10 years since the time she lived in another area more than 30 miles away. She says this is because they offer a better service. But the reality is that she doesn't want to go through the uncertainty of exploring a more local provider, even though that would save her petrol and probably give her an equal or better service.

The optician has achieved this by delivering an emotionally satisfying service experience which gives reassurance through knowing her history and understanding her situation. The rational part of her brain should be telling her to go to a more local optician but it is the emotional impulse which is the driving factor here.

Short communications stand out, especially where they resonate across more than one sense

When treating pets and communicating health issues and relative treatment regimes to owners, is verbal communication enough? And what is the effect of what may often be a rather uninspiring piece of written information, which may not be read? How often do we read instructions given to us in black and white? In one study involving patients over age 60 who were treated at two public hospitals, 81 percent could not read or understand basic materials, ...such as prescription labels.³

It is also important to think about the communications we all receive on a daily basis and how we respond to them. There are numerous figures about but we receive an average of 247 commercial messages and 3,000 advertising messages every day.

