

## **Client compliance & decision-making - Research-findings that help us to help them**

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### **1. Introduction**

While dog walking has known benefits for human mental, physical and social wellbeing<sup>1</sup> there is less research on its impact on dogs. Veterinary treatment plans may require modifications to dog-walking routines, and owners may not always comply with veterinary advice. This presentation outlines research into owners' decision-making about dog walking, particularly how they modify their dogs' walking patterns according to veterinary advice based on medical and behavioural needs.

### **2. Methods**

A JISC survey gathered information on owner and dog demographics, walking habits, beliefs about dog walking in general and their dog in particular, and beliefs around modifying walks following veterinary advice (for medical or behavioural reasons, increasing or decreasing walks). Participants rated their likelihood of compliance. The survey was distributed internationally via multiple channels; data were analysed with IBM SPSS.

### **3. Results**

There were 1590 responses received. It was found that owners were least likely to reduce walks for a behavioural reason and most likely to do so for a medical one. A multinomial logistic regression model was built to identify predictors for the difference in this decision-making. The age of the respondent was the only significant covariate identified. Owners' beliefs about the importance of dog walking for the dog's physical health, their own social connection, and their perception of expectations of responsible ownership were identified as significant predictors. Nagelkerke  $R^2 = 0.757$  showed excellent model fit.

### **4. Discussion**

This study shows that dog owners are significantly less likely to comply with their veterinarians' advice to walk their dog less if it is for a behavioural reason. Their beliefs about walking's benefits for their dogs' physical health, their social connections, and responsible dog ownership are factors which influence their decision-making and implementation of treatment plans. Future work should explore veterinarian communication styles<sup>2</sup> and other owner beliefs, norms, perceived self-efficacy, skills, abilities and environmental factors, which may influence their capacity to implement

change.<sup>3</sup> Human medical health behaviour change literature<sup>4</sup> may provide insights into factors to consider when designing effective treatment plans.

## **5. Conclusion**

Consideration of individual dog owners' beliefs about their dog's physical health, responsible ownership, and the role of dog walking for their social wellbeing are crucial in veterinary treatment planning, especially if reducing walks for behavioural reasons is advised.

## **References**

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