Tips for Accommodating an Assistance Dog Team

In the November/December 2011 issue of Today’s Veterinary Practice, the article **Making a Difference...One Assistance Dog at a Time: An Interview with Dr. Anita Migday** (page 96) mentioned the availability of the following tips on the TVP website. To read the full article, select **Back Issues** from the top navigation bar on the homepage; then choose the issue from the list.

**Arrival & Reception**
Treating an assistance dog team starts in the parking lot.
- Access is the key—whether it is a parking area with sufficient room for egress from the vehicle or a wheelchair accessible ramp to your clinic door.
- Having the client call when they are on their way can give a technician time to greet them at their car and expedite the arrival process.
- Common courtesies, such as holding heavy doors open and removing obstacles, mean a lot.
- Prepare the examination room by removing chairs and positioning examination tables to provide as much floor space as possible.

**In the Examination Room**
As you listen (and hear) the story of what tasks the dog does in daily life, you will be able to assess where you need to focus your examination.
- A dog that puts miles on its paws on city streets/public transit may need to have its feet trimmed of excess hair that inevitably has bubble gum or tar trapped in it.
- Slip off the harness and check for chafing or pressure sores.
- If you need to do something uncomfortable to the dog, move and speak slowly, avoid rough movements, give a cookie, and keep the client occupied by telling your own story so they are not concerned about the pain or discomfort the dog is feeling. Take a break if needed to let the dog settle during this time.
- Clients are always concerned about their dogs’ weight since exercising their dog may be extremely difficult. Discuss options, such as new low-calorie treats and environmental enrichment.
- Preventive medical plans should include noncore vaccines, such as those for canine influenza and kennel cough, due to the high exposure these dogs face in public places.
- Finally, be generous and frequent with your compliments! A disabled human partner has to work extra hard for things that we would do easily, such as keep a nose clean from breakfast or maintain tidy ears.