

**PHONE ESTIMATES:
ANY RELATIONSHIP TO THE
ACTUAL INVOICE IS PURELY
COINCIDENTAL**

One of the most common questions people (referring colleagues and clients) ask when they phone us is “how much will it cost?” I can certainly understand why people would like to know this upfront as they are trying to decide if they are prepared to make the commitment of presenting their animal/patient to us for treatment. However, it is a question that is virtually impossible (and often dangerous) to answer.

Those of you who have referred to me in the past will have received a written report on the case. In about 95% of these letters I include a statement indicating that I found a number of problems in addition to or instead of the presenting complaint. Why? Because the huge majority of dental pathology is completely hidden from view in the conscious patient. What you see to spark the referral is only the most visible and obvious problem. Once the animal is anesthetized and I can probe, explore and radiograph I find all manner of problems that also need to be addressed. So, when asked for an estimate, we might say that we have no idea or that IF and only IF there is just the one obvious problem, it might cost \$X, BUT if we find other things, then that estimate goes out the window.

Sometime it goes the other way. Sometimes an animal is presented for what is perceived to be a significant problem and then I decide, on closer examination that it is not significant and needs no or only minor treatment. Also, I hear from some clients that their GP dramatically over-estimated what it

would cost to have us deal with a problem and my invoice ends up being much less than they were expecting.

If we estimate high, we risk scaring the client away and the animal does not get the benefit of our services. If we estimate low and then find a mess of surprises, we look like we are pulling a bait-and-switch. Either way, giving estimates over the phone for an animal we have not seen is always risky business. That is why we may often say it could be anywhere from \$X to \$5X or more depending on what we find and how we decide to manage it. Until the animal is on the table, it is anyone’s guess.

This is also why we usually insist that the owner stays at our office until I have their pet anesthetized. That way, I can do my detailed oral examination and radiographs and then discuss the revised problem list with the owner. We then develop a definitive treatment plan together, I can generate a more accurate estimate and obtain consent to proceed.

So, by all means, feel free to call us about your challenging dental and oral cases and you can even ask for an estimate. Just don’t expect it to be very accurate.

[Regulations of the College of Veterinarians of Ontario prevent me for listing actual prices in a public forum.]