

Dear CAC family and friends,

The last several months have been difficult and while we hope to return soon to our normal scheduling and manner of providing services, we have no idea when that will be. Therefore, we want to share with everyone our experience through this. Many people have suffered through illness, loss of someone they loved, loss of employment, and other struggles. Coupled with fear and stress, Covid-19 has definitely turned the world upside down.

We know because we've lived through it, too. We each have our own family, our own stresses and fears. Since Covid-19 first appeared in New York State, CAC has never closed. In fact, due to heavy regulations for businesses and veterinary clinics, we expanded our hours and days of service to 8 PM, seven days a week, as well as providing our services for overnight emergencies. We have always been closed weekends because it is important to us that our hard working employees get to rest and spend time with their families. Through Covid-19 however, there was no other way to try to accommodate the amount of patients we have, while keeping our staff safe and being compliant with state regulations.

We did and are doing our absolute best to adapt to extreme changes that required us to completely redesign our entire hospital flow from top to bottom. We happily did this so that we could take care of our patients and keep our staff safe. In the early stages, the changes from the state came so rapidly that we sometimes had complete changes from day to day. Limiting the staff in the building and keeping the teams apart was necessary not only for their safety (and their family's safety) but if a staff member would have become infected, the entire clinic would have had to close leaving us unavailable to care for our patients. This would mean no medical care, no medication refills, etc. Our doctors and teams have been double and triple booked for months, trying to see as many of our patients as possible. On some days, the teams were so heavily inundated with sick pets that we had to refer some pets to the Veterinary Medical Center because we couldn't accommodate them. This isn't because we didn't want to help them, it was because at a critical point of capacity, we simply could not see any more pets at a given time and give them the proper medical care they deserve. Remember, until reopening began, the clinic has been operating on reduced staffing due to state safety mandates. We have also not been able to provide routine care until recently.

Many of our clients were very understanding and supportive as we struggled through heavy regulation, limited staff, long hours and constant changing policies. Some were even extremely kind and brought or sent us tasty treats (which we appreciated immensely).

Unfortunately as the fear and stress associated with Covid-19 took hold of the country, we were met with many hostile calls when we could not quadruple book another sick pet, allow people inside the building, or even provide routine care like toe nail trims. Our staff (who feel the same stressors about Covid-19 that everyone does) have been yelled at and verbally abused while working long shifts to care for sick pets and putting themselves at risk as essential employees. This has been disheartening to say the least.

We sometimes make mistakes and sometimes miss the mark. Although we try our hardest not to, the reality is that we are human. We do our best to learn from our mistakes. We aim for the

highest level of patient care and customer service, even in these times of crisis. It is always our goal to communicate as clearly and effectively as possible to our clients so that we are always on the same page and our clients are never surprised. We know that gaps in communication leave room for assumption, which is never a good thing.

We work in veterinary medicine because we love animals. Contrary to popular belief, we don't get to play with puppies and kittens all day (although that would be great!) It is hard work. Long, physically intense hours, stressful and sad situations are a reality of our job. It is very hard to help you say goodbye to your pet, who in many cases we have cared for since they were puppies or kittens. It is hard to stop everything we are doing to try and save a pet that is rushed through our doors in an emergency situation and, despite our best efforts, does not make it. When we walk out the door at the end of the night, those thoughts and feelings follow us home. Yet we come back every day because we love our patients and we love what we do.

The field of veterinary medicine has an unusually high suicide rate. This is attributed to the stressors associated with working in this field. Depression, anxiety, euthanasia, life-work balance, abusive words and emails from clients, and online bullying are some of the contributing factors. It is not uncommon for people in our career to be accused of "being in it for the money" or not providing free services because "we must not care about pets." These are some of the most insulting, cruel, and incredibly untrue words that could ever be said to a veterinary staff member. Sometimes people forget that even though we love our patients, we are a business. We are in the business of providing medical care for animals, which is an expensive business to run. That is a reality but it doesn't mean we don't love animals. We have substantial bills to pay every month for equipment, drugs and supplies, etc. (which are just a few of the bills). These companies do not allow us to delay payments or set up payment plans, the bill is due when it is due and we have to pay it.

We do not receive state or federal money like human hospitals. We also have staff to pay who have families. Contrary to popular belief, people in the veterinary industry makes substantially less than our human health care counterparts, yet our professionals are still required to have extensive education and skill. This leads to a very imbalanced income-to-debt ratio for veterinarians and veterinary staff. Our unlicensed personnel are also educated, highly trained, and are incredibly invaluable to our profession and we cannot do what we do without them.

Our team and others across the country have just worked through the most stressful months of our career because we chose to be here through Covid-19 to provide care to our patients.

We have worked tirelessly seven days a week since March 20th, including Memorial Day, to accommodate our patient load safely for our clients as best as we can.

We have been yelled at, bullied, and subject to accusations and rudeness for doing our best under intense regulation that is out of our control.

We understand that these have been and are very stressful times for people, but not only is it inappropriate to take it out on us, it isn't fair.

We expect every single member of our team to be treated with the kindness and respect they deserve, whether they be a receptionist, assistant, technician or veterinarian. It is unacceptable to be rude to our receptionists and be nice to the doctor.

Please remember this when you call our office or interact with our staff.

Be kind, we are doing our best.

We would like to thank the many wonderful clients who are and have always been kind and friendly to us. Veterinary care isn't just a service we provide. It's a partnership between our team and pet owners with the goal of working together to provide wonderful lives for the pets we love. Thank you for caring and working with us to provide care to your beloved pets.

Sincerely,

The Staff at Cicero Animal Clinic, P.C.

Dr. Gayanna Gilbraith, DVM, Practice Owner

Meg Oliver, CVPM, Practice Manager

Dr. Kimberly Cargill, DVM

Dr. Pamella Ranalli, DVM

Dr. Courtney Hale, DVM

Lauren Morey, LVT, Head Technician

Ally Gardner, LVT

Kathy Vanderworken, LVT

Corinne Marmon, LVT

Carrie Curry, LVT Provisional

Lindsey Bartholomew, Veterinary Assistant

Meghanne Cummings, Veterinary Assistant

Keith Gilbraith, Facilities Manager, Veterinary Assistant

Katie Youngs, Veterinary Assistant

Carlee Pacht, Veterinary Assistant, Receptionist

Erin Hawley, Veterinary Assistant

Marcy Lyle, Receptionist

Morgan Knopp, Receptionist

Lily Allen, Human Resources/Receptionist

Keri Gorthey, Receptionist

Mikayla Brown, Veterinary Assistant