

Fear Free First for Harrisons

Harrison Family Vets in Reading have become the first practice outside of North America to achieve Fear Free Veterinary Practice Certification. They join all the Fear Free Certified Veterinary Practices in North America who have undergone a rigorous assessment and inspection process to be awarded Fear Free status. Although it has been possible for overseas individuals to be Fear Free certified, and there are already over 1,350 certified in the UK, it has not previously been possible for a practice to become certified. Harrison Family Vets has worked with the Fear Free team during the past several months, to enable inspection and certification to take place in the UK and they now intend to have every one of their expanding group officially certified. Kristie Faulkner, Operations Director, explained “We are delighted to have achieved this certification as we wholeheartedly believe that this is the best way to carry out veterinary practice for clients, the team, and most importantly the pets. We aim for all of our clinics to reach this standard in the immediate future.”

The Fear Free movement was founded in 2016 by renowned veterinarian Dr Marty Becker in the USA. Since inception, over 320,000 veterinary professionals, pet professionals, animal welfare communities, and pet owners have registered for Fear Free’s programs and courses. Fear Free has become the accepted gold standard within North American veterinary practices with most veterinary schools also adopting the programme.

“Just like with humans, a pet can’t be optimally healthy unless they’re also happy,” said Dr Becker “Fear, anxiety, and stress (FAS) in life raises the levels of hormones that are destructive to both the body and mind. Fear Free uses clinically proven protocols to remove or reduce FAS triggers, it takes steps to mitigate FAS so that the pet feels safe and calm during a veterinary visit. The worst thing for a pet parent to feel is that they’re ‘hurting their pet by trying to help them’. In a Fear Free Certified Veterinary Practice, we ‘take the pet out of petrified and put the treat into treatment’. Expect tails to wag and cats to purr.”

“The certification of Harrison Family Vets is a fantastic way for Fear Free to announce their formal expansion into the UK, New Zealand and Australia,” said Randy Valpy, Fear Free’s CEO. “For years individual veterinary staff have been able to become certified, but they have had to pay in US dollars and there wasn’t a mechanism for practices to become certified. With a simplified pricing structure for practice certification and a new website launching in early 2024 we will be promoting our programs using local currencies.”

The practice certification process took Harrison Family Vets several months to achieve. Group Clinical Director, James Harris, who led the project outlined “The message behind Fear Free in protecting the emotional well-being of pets under our care fitted easily with our own beliefs. Taking this to the next level required an open and honest team conversation,

development of realistic protocols and a subtle change in behaviours to ensure we always put the pet first within a supportive work environment". On the resource needed to achieve certification, he added "Most of the changes have been doing things differently rather than actually doing more". Initially Harrison Family Vets had committed to certifying every single one of its team, clinical and non-clinical, but wanted to go a stage further. Yvette Rowntree, Clinic Director at Reading, commented "We are so proud to have been the first of what we hope will be many certified practices in the UK. Working in a truly committed Fear Free environment makes such a difference to the pets we treat". Kristie Faulkner concluded "When we first learned about Fear Free from a former American colleague, we were told that it is a superior way to practice. Having adopted it, we now believe this completely and hope that for the benefit of all pets, many other practices will follow our lead".

"We are absolutely thrilled to have Harrison Family Vets as our first UK Fear Free Certified Veterinary Practice" said Dr Jennifer Merlo, Fear Free's Director of Veterinary Affairs, "We now plan to certify further practices in the UK and beyond providing veterinary professionals with the knowledge and techniques to practice quality medicine while showing consideration for patient's emotional health as well."

The Fear Free team will be attending London Vet Show in November and Dr Becker will be presenting on how Fear Free radically changes companion animal practice and the benefits to pets, people, and practice.

About Harrison Family Vets

Harrison Family Vets were established in 2021. They are a family owned independent group, with three generations of the Harrison family currently working in the group. They currently operate five practices in Reading, Dudley, Didsbury, Stockton, and Doncaster. They aim to open a further five practices in 2024 and aim to have in excess of thirty practices across the country by the end of the decade.

About Fear Free

Founded by Dr Marty Becker and developed by hundreds of experts in behaviour, medicine, and handling, Fear Free offers online and in-person education to veterinary professionals, the pet professional community, animal shelter staff and volunteers, and pet owners. Fear Free provides both professionals and pet lovers alike with the knowledge and tools to look after a pet's physical and emotional wellbeing.

Veterinary or pet professionals can learn more about becoming Fear Free Certified by visiting fearfreepets.com. Pet owners can visit fearfreehappyhomes.com to access free videos, articles, and more that will help improve the physical and emotional health of their pets right at home. Shelter, rescue, and animal welfare employees and volunteers can visit fearfreeshelters.com to enrol in the complimentary program.

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