More than half of the patients our practice sees are likely overweight, according to data from the Association for Pet Obesity Prevention. But about 95 percent of pet owners identify their pets as normal weight. It’s no fun to have to be the one to break the bad news to clients. But how our team handles this conversation can make a big difference in how pet owners respond—and whether they take the next steps to make healthier feeding choices for their pets.

2-minute activity: Watch two ways to talk about a pet’s weight
We’re going to start by watching Dr. Ernie Ward demonstrate a difficult pet weight discussion—and show a better way to smooth these sometimes challenging conversations. [Play the video at dvm360.com/fatpettalk.] What did you think about those two conversations? What would you say to this client? [Take one or two answers.] Thank you.

3-minute activity: Role-play and talk terminology
Now it's time for us to tackle a tough discussion. We’re going to break into pairs to take turns practicing the delicate topic of pets’ weight. [Pass out the team training tool “Open up about obesity.”] Allow two minutes for both team members to practice the script. Next, let’s brainstorm the best—and worst—words you can use when you discuss a pet’s weight issue. [Allow a minute for brainstorming.] Would anyone like to share the best and worst words and phrases you came up with? [Take one or two answers.] Thank you. Finally, I’d like to give you one more tool you can use in your weight conversations. [Distribute the handouts, “How can I tell if my pet is overweight?” “Tips for healthy weight loss in cats” and “Weight loss in dogs.”] This can give pet owners a starting point to take home and discuss their pets’ weight with other decision-makers in the family.

1-minute activity: Thank your team
Thank you for taking the time to weigh in on this weighty issue. Please practice your new terminology in the next week and we’ll plan a follow-up conversation to discuss what worked at a future meeting.

Note: A week after your team meeting, plan a follow-up team meeting. Spend 10 to 15 minutes sharing your success stories and places where your team struggled. Discussing the tools you’ve put to practice reinforces their importance and gives your team a chance to brainstorm solutions to any sticking points that might reduce compliance.