

# Success Strategies

Implement these winning ideas from other practitioners.



## Relief veterinarians: the missing piece to your staffing puzzle

When a full-time associate needs time off for vacation, continuing education, maternity leave, or illness, a relief veterinarian can be the perfect solution to your staffing gap.

Tracey O'Driscoll-Packer, a practice management consultant in San Luis Obispo, Calif., says relief veterinarians can be found through local veterinary organizations or local equine care networks. Ideal candidates are mature, easy-going, and understand they are coming into a practice where they must adhere to the structures and processes already in place.

Two groups of veterinarians primarily make up the relief veterinarian population: young doctors who haven't committed to a practice yet, and older practitioners who are transitioning into retirement. O'Driscoll-Packer suggests an older veterinarian because he or she is likely to be mature, committed, more experienced, and flexible. Some advantages of using a relief veterinarian are more scheduling flexibility for your practice and motivation to organize policies and procedures.

One downside to hiring a relief veterinarian is cost. They can be expensive, but O'Driscoll-Packer says that since the practice isn't paying benefits for that employee, the cost is comparable with a full-time employee. "The value can't be measured simply in a daily fee," she says. "The workforce is requiring more flexibility, something that will be a factor in bonding your employees with your practice long-term."

For your experience with a relief veterinarian to be successful, your practice should have policies and procedures spelled out and printed. Also, staff members must be willing to adjust to new leadership and respect the new veterinarian's authority.

To ensure that clients will be comfortable with a relief veterinarian, notify them when

they make their appointment that they will be seeing a different doctor. Have the scheduling staff tell clients where the new doctor is from and why he or she is there. Let them know the relief veterinarian is qualified to see their animal.

Relief veterinarians are a growing population in the field, and will continue to be a valuable option as more full-time employees search for balance between their professional and personal lives.

## The buck stops here: no pay, no go

To alleviate problems with accounts receivable, John Gifford, DVM has implemented a "no pay, no go" policy for his mobile equine service, Western Reserve Veterinary Service in Akron, Ohio. "Payment is required when services are rendered," he says.

Dr. Gifford says most of his clients pay if he tells them before the visit that payment is expected immediately. This policy is necessary for him to keep practicing high-quality medicine. Doctors who bill for services eventually find themselves facing cash flow issues.

"After a while your pocketbook gets low even though your heart is big," he says. "My heart doesn't buy my groceries at the store each week."

Dr. Gifford says practitioners shouldn't be afraid to ask for payment up front. Once a client is familiar with your payment policy, collections become easier. "Most people have a checking account and a credit card. We've had some checks bounce, but not many," he says.

If for some reason a client can't pay when Dr. Gifford arrives at the site—despite having been informed of the policy—he schedules a follow-up appointment and makes it clear that he will collect his fee at that visit.

"One of the responsibilities of owning an animal is providing veterinary services," he says. "My job is to treat the horse; the client's job is to pay me." ■

### Do you have a Success Strategy worth sharing?

Share your idea with us and we'll pay you \$50 if we choose to publish it!

- Send your strategy to: *Partners In Practice*, 8033 Flint, Lenexa, KS 66214, or e-mail [partnersinpractice@intervet.com](mailto:partnersinpractice@intervet.com).
- Include your name, title, clinic name, address, e-mail, and phone number.

*Partners In Practice* is brought to you by Intervet and offers equine practitioners tools for financial success. The editors welcome submissions, suggestions, and questions. To reach us, write *Partners In Practice*, Editorial Office, 8033 Flint, Lenexa, KS 66214; e-mail [partnersinpractice@intervet.com](mailto:partnersinpractice@intervet.com); or call (800) 255-6864, ext. 144. Copyright 2005 by Intervet Inc., 29160 Intervet Lane, Millsboro, DE 19966. Reproduction without prior permission from Intervet is prohibited.

\*\*\*\*\*3-DIGIT 442  
JOHN GIFFORD OWNER DVM  
WESTERN RESERVE VET SERVICE  
PO BOX 1494  
MEDINA OH 44258-1494

