



AMERICAN ANIMAL HOSPITAL ASSOCIATION

Community Care

TOOLKIT



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Resources for Veterinary Teams

Read the guidelines and download the tools at aaha.org/community-care



2024 AAHA Community Care Guidelines for Small Animal Practice

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ABSTRACT

Community care is a creative way of thinking about health care that mobilizes resources within a community and consists of four core principles: recognition of the urgency of access-to-care for the veterinary profession, collaboration within community networks, family-centered health care, and redefining the gold standard of care. The AAHA Community Care Guidelines for Small Animal Practice offer strategies to help busy veterinary practitioners increase access to care within their practice and community by optimizing collaborative networks. While these guidelines do not claim to provide definitive solutions to access-to-care issues, they propose a starting point from which private practices can explore and implement workable solutions for their community and their practice. Broadening the scope of care to reach all people with pets requires multilateral, collaborative, and creative solutions both within and outside of the veterinary profession. These solutions can begin with greater communication and collaboration between private veterinary practices and nonprofit veterinary practices, with the goal of keeping pets in their homes with their loving families as much as reasonably possible. (J Am Anim Hosp Assoc 2024; 60:1-11. DOI 10.5326/JAAHA-M5-2404)

REFERENCES

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Competing interests/relationships

¹ Mike Greenberg and Dorita McCarty are the authors of the AAHA Community Care Guidelines Task Force. These guidelines were prepared by a task force of experts convened by the American Animal Hospital Association. This document is intended as a guideline only, not an AAHA standard of care. These guidelines and recommendations should not be construed as dictating an exclusive protocol, course of treatment, or procedure. Variations in practice may be warranted based on the needs of the individual patient, resources, and limitations unique to each individual practice setting. Evidence-based support for specific recommendations has been cited where possible and appropriate. Other recommendations are based on practical clinical experience and a consensus of expert opinion. Further research is needed to document some of these recommendations. Drug approvals and labeling are current at the time of writing but may change over time. Because each case is different, veterinarians must base their decisions on the best available scientific evidence in conjunction with their own knowledge and experience.

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Community Care Guidelines

Tools available at the

Working (or other vocalizations), leading pet-friendly, person with low access to care.

Care and follow-up. Pets of Study by The Street Dog Coalition.

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Community Care Guidelines

Community Care Guidelines

Other options for treatment and care and the client's guide to care. Provide a range of care. Provide a range of care. Provide a range of care.

Remember that although cost is not the only one, it is important to consider in compassion and to include judgment, being prescriptive eye contact, an interaction.

Remember that pet caregivers may struggle with the veterinary realm, especially people who are not in control of their own lives.

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Meet Billie and Arthur, mascots of the AAHA Community Care Guidelines.

2024 AAHA COMMUNITY CARE GUIDELINES FOR SMALL ANIMAL PRACTICE

Veterinary teams want to help every pet that comes through the door...

What if practices could serve more patients and families with diverse needs by collaborating with nonprofit organizations and the community beyond their walls?

Community care is a creative way of thinking about health care that mobilizes all available resources in a community. It is a collaborative, noncompetitive care model that places the family (people + pets) at its center.

Community care uses all the tools and resources available to veterinary practices, including:

- Using a spectrum of care approach
- Recognizing and mitigating barriers to care
- Adopting a family-centered approach to health care, including a commitment to keep pets with their families whenever possible
- Collaborating with nonprofit practices like shelters, spay and neuter practices, animal welfare organizations, and community practices
- Redefining what "gold standard" practice means to bring care options to more pets and families

...but they're often constrained by factors out of their control.

The AAHA Community Care Guidelines help practices expand their offerings so they're not left with the painful decision to turn a patient away or have a client decline care.

"Gold standard" veterinary care has traditionally meant the most expensive or technologically advanced options. The new definition of gold standard includes:

- A range of diagnostic and treatment options
- Accessibility
- Consideration of the client & pet's contextual needs
- High quality and safety of care
- High likelihood of positive outcomes for the patient
- Evidence-based medicine

Learn more about innovative strategies to bring veterinary care to all pets in the 2024 AAHA Community Care Guidelines, available at aaha.org/community-care



Replacing the gold standard

Family-centered care

What does “gold standard” mean to you, and how does it affect the recommendations you make to families for their pets’ care? In the world of veterinary medicine, the gold standard can be thought of as the equivalent of winning a championship trophy in the care arena, giving your patients the best possible chance of victory. It’s a benchmark that represents high-quality medicine and often serves as the rulebook veterinary professionals learn from during their training.

However, always striving for the gold medal can have its challenges, both for the families and pets they serve and for the veterinary professionals themselves. For families, pursuing the gold standard might feel like being asked to compete at Olympic-level performance without the proper training and

equipment. This gap can lead to feelings of shame, guilt, or failure when the “ideal” care recommended feels out of

reach. In some cases, families may feel so overwhelmed by the championship-level expectations that they withdraw from the game entirely, declining all care.

For veterinary teams, the pressure to always aim for the gold can feel like playing a game where the odds are heavily stacked against them. Team members might experience moral distress when they can’t deliver the equivalent of a gold-medal performance due to the hurdles families face. When the gold standard feels like the only way to “win,” anything less can feel like a loss. This sense of falling short of the championship podium can lead to guilt and emotional fatigue among veterinary professionals.





Pursuing the gold standard might feel like being asked to compete at Olympic-level performance without the proper training and equipment.

Family-centered care: working as a team for everyone's benefit

Let's explore how family-centered care can replace the gold standard, offering a new playbook that's more inclusive and improves access to care while still prioritizing good quality care.

Many veterinary practices already implement these winning strategies daily but may not recognize how much good they are doing for the families they serve! If family-centered care is already second nature to you, keep playing your A-game and know that you are scoring big wins for your patients and their families!

If you're feeling worn out from always chasing the championship title, consider embracing family-centered care—where teamwork, support, and strategy take the lead in helping you stay in the game for the long haul. It's like switching from an all-or-nothing championship

to a friendly league where every small win counts. This approach still prioritizes your patients' health and wellbeing, all while building lasting bonds with pets and their families that feel like true victories.

Family-centered care: high-quality, system-level care that ensures services regardless of socioeconomic status and other barriers.

Spectrum of care: providing a continuum of acceptable care that considers available evidence-based medicine while remaining responsive to client expectations and financial limitations. This is a central tenant of family-centered care and the basis for all the other terms listed here.

System-level: referring out to community resources to ensure the needs of the family and pet are met (this could look like pet food pantries, low cost spay and neuter, transportation resources, etc.)

Incremental care: a stepwise approach to patient management based on medical and family priorities that avoids situations of not helping at all and/or turning patients away. For example, completing one diagnostic step at a time and evaluating the results before deciding to proceed with additional diagnostics instead of pursuing multiple diagnostics at once.

Tiered care: holding off on the more expensive or invasive procedures or skipping some sequential treatment steps to make treatment more efficient and/or cost-effective. For example, skipping imaging in a patient with suspected pyometra and proceeding directly to surgery to reduce the cost of care and allow a client's funds to be directed toward definitive treatment.

Collaborative care: a care plan that brings the veterinary team, the family, specialists, and any other animal health professionals to work together, involving "open communication, shared decision-making, and a deep respect for the bond" between pets and families.

Contextualized care: making a care plan that takes into account the needs of not only the pet, but also the family, including their goals, circumstances, and challenges.

Experience-based care: using experience and clinical judgement to create a care plan for each individual patient.

Evidence-based care: using peer-reviewed evidence to direct medical decision-making.

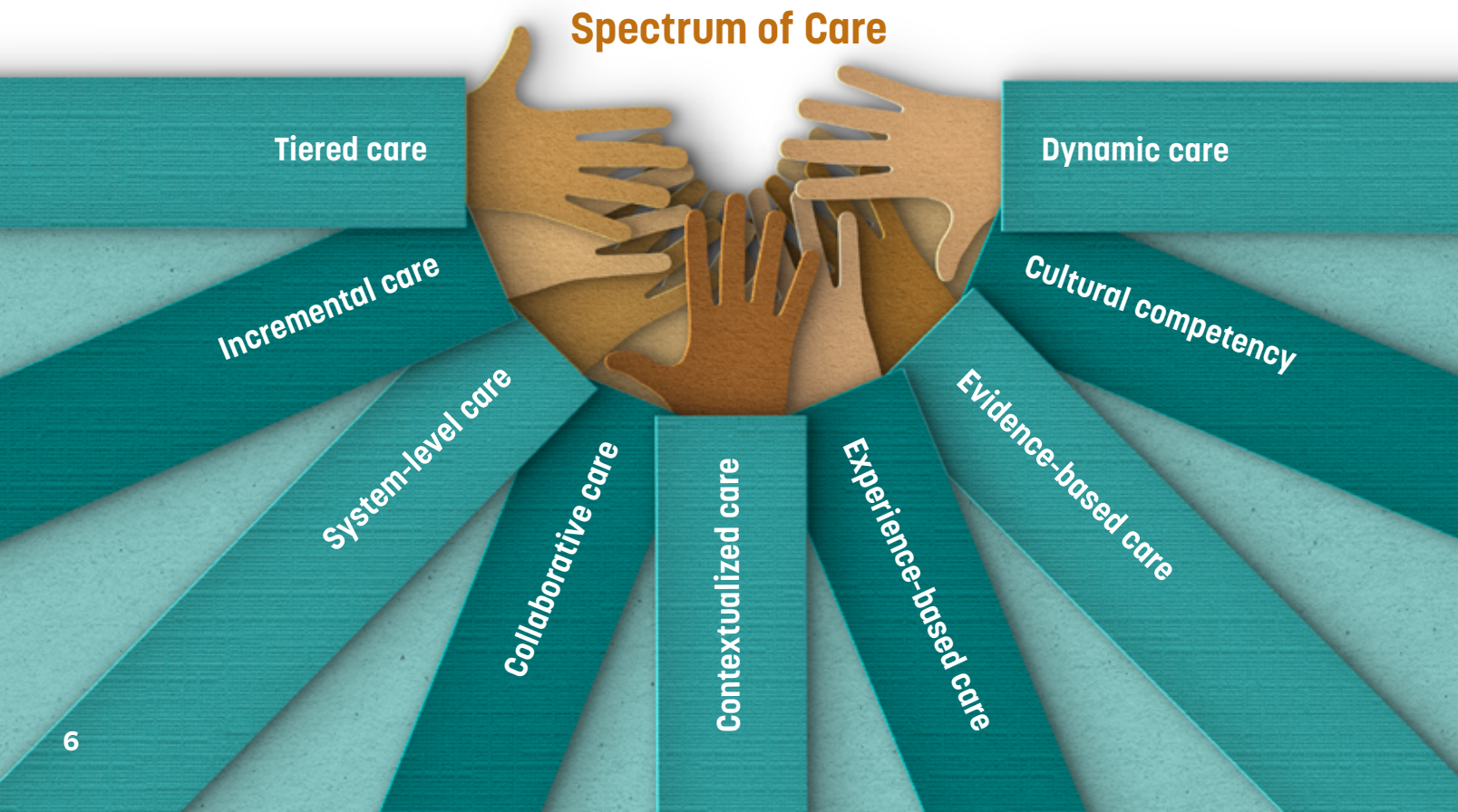
Cultural competency: considering the cultural norms, beliefs, and customs that might affect a family's understanding of, response to, and ability to accept recommended care for their pet.

Dynamic care: creating a plan that includes a range of options that can be adjusted as needed based on the pet's progress and the family's situation.

Family-centered care

Family-centered care is a team sport! Veterinary teams help their patients and families win by recruiting the spectrum of care team to play for them:

Spectrum of Care





Reframe this!

Veterinary professionals want to provide the best care possible for their patients, but it can be frustrating when families face obstacles such as financial limitations, mobility constraints, and other challenges that may prevent them from accepting the care you recommend for their pet. Over time, this frustration can lead to veterinary professionals feeling jaded, mistrustful, and even resentful of the families they serve.

If you find yourself falling into this mindset, it might be time for a reframe!

Consider some of these commonly held beliefs and ways to reframe them that prioritize family-centered care. While a reframe won't eliminate every barrier to care, it can empower you to foster trust, strengthen collaboration, and deliver compassionate care that truly supports each patient and their family.

Instead of this:

Having a pet is a luxury.

Say this:

Pets are a source of connection, improved physical and mental health, and love to many people.

Instead of this:

Our job is to offer the gold standard, and let owners decline things from there.

Say this:

Our job is to provide the best care available to that pet, taking into consideration each family's individual needs and limitations.

Instead of this:

If you can't afford the highest standard of veterinary care, don't get a pet.

Say this:

Veterinary care doesn't have to be all or nothing, and appropriate veterinary care can be achieved in a variety of ways.

Instead of this:

People should not be bailed out of their poor decisions.

Say this:

Families who seek veterinary care for their pets should be met with empathy and compassion regardless of their circumstances.

Instead of this:

Families who decline recommended care or who don't return for rechecks don't care about their pet's health or respect our expertise.

Say this:

Families may face many obstacles to accepting and keeping up with their pet's care, even when they really want to.

Instead of this:

People who can't pay for their pet's veterinary care should give their pet up.

Say this:

We can work with families by offering a spectrum of care and leveraging community resources to keep pets with their families in many cases.



Supporting a client through their challenges requires an environment of psychological safety so that they can even begin to share what their capacity is.

Capacity in Communication

Ryane Englar, DVM, DABVP (Canine and Feline Practice) is an expert in client communication in veterinary practices. As a dual appointment Professor of Practice and Executive Director of Clinical and Professional Skills at the University of Arizona College of Veterinary Medicine, she partners

with pre-clinical veterinary students to explore the importance of relationship-centered care. Such an approach to healthcare delivery not only honors the relationship between clients and their patients, but also the relationship between clients and veterinary team members.

So how can you support those relationships? Englar recommends prioritizing effective and empathetic communication. That includes asking open-ended questions and encouraging clients to share their stories. Doing so allows veterinary professionals to better understand which diagnostic and treatment recommendations work best for each patient and their family.

Sharing stories provides insights we may not have at the start of an appointment. When a client shares details about their situation, they may share some of the challenges they are facing. Examples may include limited finances, time constraints, mobility limitations, and even their stress level. These challenges can be associated with guilt, shame, and defensiveness, and in some cases, clients may not feel comfortable even disclosing them. To help reduce discomfort around disclosing limitations clients face, Englar prefers using the term capacity.



The case for capacity

Capacity can be defined as the “actual or potential ability to perform or withstand.”¹

When this is applied to clients, this can look like financial capacity, temporal capacity, physical capacity, and emotional capacity.

Englar said this term is helpful because it shifts the focus away from the client toward circumstances that may be out of their control.

“A lot of times we’re afraid to say, I’m too busy or I can’t afford it,” Englar said. “Because that means I’ve just exhibited a weakness and a vulnerability.”

It can sometimes feel much easier to say, “I don’t have the capacity for that,” she explained.

It’s important to know that a client’s capacities can change over time, Englar added. She compares the

concept of capacity to a fuel gauge in a car. It may read close to full some of the time, but at other times it may be much closer to empty, particularly when challenges or stressors compound. But then circumstances can change, our tanks get refilled, and our fuel gauge rises once again.



Capacity in veterinary practice

Englar explained that just like the many different types of challenges clients face when considering their pet’s care options, capacity is multi-dimensional.

Imagine a client who has to bring their cat in for an exam. That experience starts at home when they struggle to get their cat into the carrier. They may get bitten or scratched in the process. By the time they get in their car, they are bleeding and frustrated. Now they’re running late to the appointment, and they hit every red light in town on the way there. When they arrive at the hospital, the waiting room is packed. It’s loud between dogs barking and their own cat yowling.

The client service representative makes a comment about their late arrival, which adds fuel to the fire. They now must wait longer to be seen, filled with feelings of exhaustion, guilt, and anxiety. By the time the veterinary team starts the encounter, this client’s fuel gauge is likely reading very low, and they no longer have the emotional capacity to participate in discussions about their cat’s health and care plan.

Additionally, the client may not be comfortable administering oral medication to their cat in pill form because the cat struggles and spits the medication out or because the client has trouble opening child resistant packaging. These are examples of their physical capacity.

The client’s schedule may limit their ability to return for a recheck exam at the recommended interval, which represents their temporal capacity.

¹ The Free Dictionary. <https://www.thefreedictionary.com/capacity>



A client whose physical capacity to medicate their pet is limited due to arthritis might benefit from having a choice of medication formulations or having their prescription sent home in non-child resistant packaging.

When the cost of the recommended treatment options is discussed, the client's financial capacity will factor into their decision.

All these capacities can affect how the client responds to the team's recommendations and the level of care the pet ultimately receives.

For example, a client's financial capacity on a given day can vary based on how close they are to pay day. Likewise, their emotional capacity will depend on what else has happened during that day and what other stressors they are experiencing.



Including capacity in communication

Supporting a client through their challenges requires an environment of psychological safety so that they can even begin to share what their capacity is. "That gives clients the freedom to share and the feeling that what they have to share will be received readily without judgment," she said.

Veterinary team members can use open-ended questions to ask clients about their capacities and reflect back what they are hearing to confirm understanding.

An example conversation might look like this:

"What is your capacity to start Bailey on medication today and return in two weeks for a recheck exam?"

And after the client has given their answer, the veterinary professional should reflect back, "What I'm hearing is _____. Did I understand you correctly?"

Then, veterinary teams can use the information they learn to tailor their approach to best meet the client's needs.

For example, a client with limited emotional capacity may not be able to digest a detailed explanation of their pet's condition during the appointment. Team members can send the client home with a handout or refer the client to a website that they can review on their own and

then follow up at a later time to discuss any questions and confirm the plan.

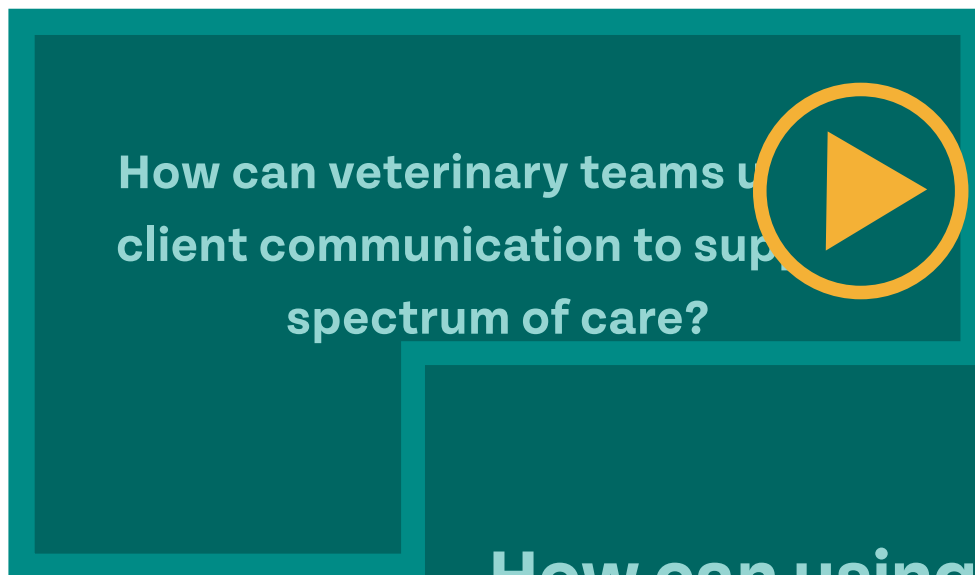
A client with limited financial capacity may need to approach their pet's treatment plan incrementally, by splitting diagnostics and/or procedures into multiple steps over separate visits. The client may need to hold off on certain steps to prioritize others that in effect customize the care plan to fit their budget and the patient's needs.

A client whose physical capacity to medicate their pet is limited due to arthritis, for example, might benefit from having a choice of medication formulations or having their prescription sent home in non-child resistant packaging.

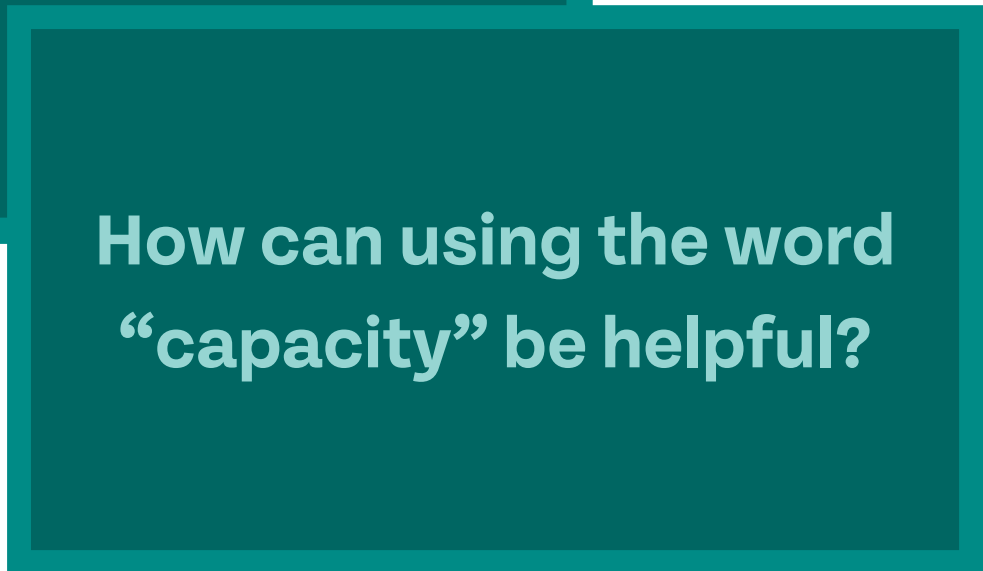
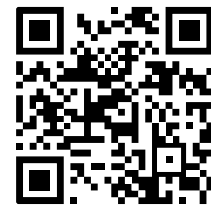
Everyone benefits when veterinary teams offer options that tailor the approach to healthcare delivery. Contextualizing care is possible when clients feel heard, understood, and respected. Discussing capacity is one way to approach healthcare with regard, setting judgment to the side. The perception of being judged can be a significant barrier to trust and erode the veterinarian-client-patient relationship (VCPR).

“Setting judgment aside and having regard means creating a space in which clients feel that you won't turn your back on them,” Englar said, “that you'll hear and listen to them, that you'll accept clients as they are without comparing them to others or making them feel bad for what they can or can't do.”

Video: Capacity and Communication in Veterinary Practice



Click or scan QR code to view video



Ryane Englar, DVM, DABVP (Canine and Feline Practice), Professor of Practice, Executive Director of Clinical and Professional Skills, University of Arizona College of Veterinary Medicine



Overcoming obstacles

The role of angel funds in supporting families

Have you experienced this scenario in veterinary practice? A family comes in with their pet who is sick or injured and needs veterinary care, but they can't afford it. You may know exactly what your patient needs and feel reasonably sure that the recommended care would help your patient. But even with available financing options, there's no way the family can make it work. You can direct the family toward charitable foundations where they can apply for financial assistance to help cover the costs, but this usually takes time. What if time is not an option?

This is when it can be helpful to have your own charitable fund that you can access more quickly and have more control over how you use. Enter the angel fund: a fund that a veterinary team can use to award grants to families to help them afford urgently needed veterinary care at the practice.

Angel funds can have different structures

- **Some practices create their own angel fund** in house, collecting donations from other clients and having total ownership and control over how and when the funds are dispersed.
- **Some practices work with a third-party organization** such as the Veterinary Care Foundation that manages the funds raised by the practice and handles the accounting and tax reporting associated with the account. With this setup, the practice will likely have complete control over how and when the funds are dispersed.

- **Some practices choose to access funds created and managed by veterinary associations** of which they are a member. These include funds such as the American Veterinary Medical Foundation founded by the AVMA and the Angel Fund founded by the Southern California Veterinary Medical Association and the Animal Health Foundation. With this type of angel fund, the practice doesn't have to raise the money or manage the account, but the fund may have more limits in terms of the amount of money available to a practice and the types of cases that qualify for coverage.

According to Jennifer Hawkins, DVM, Executive Director of the Southern California Veterinary Medical Association, and Misty Hirschbein, DVM, MS, CVA, former SCVMA board member, here are some tips to consider when creating or utilizing an angel fund:

- Consult with an attorney and/or accountant on the best ways to manage donated funds. These experts can provide guidance on the best ways to keep the donations separate from other hospital revenue. They can also help practices comply with any tax liability and provide transparency as to how the money is being managed and dispersed.
 - If you are using an outside source of funding, consider matching the grant amount internally if the case warrants it. This is a requirement for grant approval from some organizations.
 - Consider what criteria (if any) you want to require families to meet to be eligible for an angel fund grant. This can include requiring them to apply for third-party financing and/or requiring clients to fund a certain portion of their bill themselves.
 - Based on your community's makeup and needs, you may consider creating an angel fund that serves a particular segment of the community, such as seniors, disabled individuals, or veterans.
 - Want your team members to have more say in how funds are dispersed? Consider giving each team member an annual grant allowance (\$100 for example) that they can award at their own discretion to cover patients' care.
- You don't necessarily have to advertise your angel fund. This can be something that team members use their discretion to offer to families on a case-by-case basis. "This is not something a client should come in asking for," Hirschbein said.
 - Come up with a script and practice ways to broach the topic of finances with sensitivity. While some families may openly express their need for financial assistance, others may be hesitant to disclose their needs or ask for help out of a sense of embarrassment or shame. Instead of assuming that finances are the cause Hirschbein will sometimes ask open-ended questions such as "Is there an obstacle that we can help with?"



If you are using an outside source of funding, consider matching the grant amount internally if the case warrants it.

Crossing the finish line

How an angel fund helped a devoted pet parent afford the “last step” in their cat’s treatment plan

Misty Hirschbein, DVM, MS, CVA, an associate veterinarian at North Valley Veterinary Center in Lancaster, California, recounts the story of how an angel fund helped a senior cat with stomatitis reach his happy ending.



A very nice woman came to my practice with her super sweet 16-year-old cat, who had a raging case of stomatitis. She was financially limited but did everything she could including lab work, medication, and starting a therapeutic diet. The cat started to improve, but he still needed dental treatment.



The client was very compliant but couldn't afford the “last step in her cat’s recommended care plan, an anesthetic dental cleaning with extractions. I told her, I’m going to apply for a grant to get some help so that we can take your cat to surgery.” It was a delicate conversation that I approached carefully to help prevent her from feeling embarrassed.



Thankfully, we were approved for the grant in no time at all! We scheduled the dental procedure and extracted most of his teeth. I expected to hear from the family in a day or two with lots of questions. But I didn't, and the next time I saw her was a few weeks later for our scheduled recheck. Her cat had gained weight and was eating well! She was so happy she was in tears! She asked to hug me, and I received a thank you card from her after that.



It makes me feel good to have a tool to be able to help my patients and their families meet the standard of care, not having to rehome or euthanize the pet, or have chronic visits and do things that potentially may not be as effective. Seeing animals be much more comfortable has been a huge reward.



Keeping pets and families together in the hospital

Going to the veterinary hospital can be a stressful experience for pets. As veterinary professionals, we know this and are well versed in the ways to reduce stress for our patients. But what about the stress families experience? In addition to worrying about whatever brought them into the practice to begin with, families may be worried about their pet's stress. They want to be able to continue to comfort and care for them. When they are separated from their pet and they hear a dog yelp or a cat cry out, they wonder if it is their pet. They wonder what is going on. They can't understand what is taking so long. They wonder if everything is ok.

All these concerns (and more) have inspired some veterinary practices to find ways to keep pets and families together as much as possible throughout their time in the hospital. This might look like having pets' blood drawn in the exam room in with their family present, letting family members look on from nearby while pets have

radiographs taken or undergo surgery, and even inviting families to stay with their pets when they are hospitalized.

There can be multiple benefits to keeping pets and their families together in the practice. Kenichiro Yagi, MS, RVT, VTS (ECC) (SAIM), Director of Nursing for Veterinary Emergency Group, has worked in this type of setting in multiple different practices. He reports that many pets will be less stressed if they can see and/or interact with their family, which can facilitate patient handling and reduce the time spent on each procedure.

Families are also often less stressed when they can see and be with their pet and participate (at least emotionally) in their care. Being with their pet helps them to know that their pet is comfortable and well cared for. It helps families see all the work that goes into the care their pets receive, which helps them understand the value of their pet's treatment plan. It also helps families

understand why everything takes as long as it does. In cases where multiple families are with their pets in the same space, Yagi has also noted that families tend to interact with and support each other when they see what each pet is dealing with. "It's pretty neat to see," he said.

Veterinary professionals who have never worked this way can sometimes be very resistant to this concept. Yagi reports that one of the most common objections to this way of practicing is a fear of being watched by pet owners while caring for pets.



**What if I make a mistake,
or what if something
goes wrong?**

**What if the family
member distracts me
by constantly talking or
asking questions?**

**What if having the family
present makes the pet's
anxiety worse?**

**What if a family member
gets injured while trying
to comfort or hold their
pet during a procedure?
Will I be held liable?**



Ways to mitigate these concerns



Engineer the environment

Some practices are designed and built to support an open concept and have features in place like full length windows in the surgery suite and spacious treatment areas with plenty of places to sit. But even if your practice was not constructed with the plan to have families present throughout all spaces, you may find ways to accommodate families in more parts of the hospital without interfering with workflows. This might involve strategic placement of chairs, partitions, or even markings on the floor to help guide pet owners to areas where they can safely stay close to their pet and see what is happening while staying safe and out of the veterinary team's way.



Set expectations

If family members are not used to seeing their pets have blood drawn or be positioned for radiographs, you can help them know what to expect so that they are less stressed or surprised by what they see. This can include warnings about how their pet might react ("this injection may sting, and your pet may jump or cry out") or the fact that certain procedures may take multiple attempts to complete. It's also good to warn individuals who might be sensitive to blood or needles so that they have the opportunity look or move away if desired.



Teach families how to behave

Veterinary professionals are trained in the appropriate ways to interact with animals while they receive veterinary care, but most family members are not. The entire experience will run more smoothly if you tell them what to do. This includes everything from telling them where to sit or stand, what they can and cannot touch, and how they can interact with their pet. You can position family members in ways so that they are less

likely to get bitten while their pet is having blood drawn and encourage them to scratch their pet's back instead. You can also direct them to speak reassuringly to their pet instead of angrily or nervously.



Make your practice brag-worthy

There's a caveat, Yagi explains, to having families present throughout their pets' time in the practice—they will observe how your team handles

patients, treats each other, and maintains the cleanliness of the practice. If there's something you wouldn't feel comfortable with families seeing, it might be worth asking if there's a better way to do it to begin with.

Making the leap—it's ok to start small!

If your team is looking to experiment with more of an open concept, it's important for your team to come together first and get on the same page. "The hardest

part," Yagi explains, "is the human part." You need to convince all the relevant parties that this is a good thing that they want to institute.

If the concept of keeping pets and families together during their visit is completely new to your team, it's ok to start small. Yagi recommends starting with procedures that are considered lower "level of risk," meaning things that are least stressful or difficult to start conducting in front of pet owners for the first time. These procedures also tend to have the lowest potential for a negative experience in front of the client. If you are already comfortable performing lower-risk procedures in front of families, you can move up to medium and higher risk procedures.

It's important to also keep in mind that what is low risk may vary from practice to practice based on the skills and experience level of team members. Yagi recommends picking two or three procedures or skills to introduce first. Once the logistics have been planned and team members feel more confident performing them in front of families, it's time to give feedback and review the process so that adjustments can be made if needed. ■



Families are also often less stressed when they can see and be with their pet and participate (at least emotionally) in their care.

Starting a veterinary community outreach effort

A roadmap for success

Veterinary practices are businesses, and as such they must charge appropriately for their services. However, if you want to find ways to give back to your community or meet a need, there are many ways that you can do this alongside your work in practice that make a real difference in your community!

According to Jena Valdez, DVM, Chief Medical Officer of the San Francisco SPCA, there are some strategies that can make your efforts more effective and meaningful to the community you serve.

Know and listen to your community. This can include talking to clients and consulting with community organizations such as animal control, the health department, and humane societies. Ask questions and observe trends to determine which types of efforts would be most useful.

- Are there disease outbreaks that might warrant a vaccine clinic?
- Is there a lack of understanding on a pet health topic that could be addressed with an educational presentation?
- Is there a language or cultural barrier that could be bridged by members of your team who mirror the community you wish to serve?
- Would a microchipping booth at a community fair ahead of hurricane season be helpful?
- Could your clinic collect pet food and other supplies to help support a local animal shelter in need?

Make sure to solicit feedback after your event to learn how your efforts were received. That way, you can make changes if needed before your next event.

Don't duplicate efforts. If another local organization is already holding a rabies vaccine clinic, try to find another community need to address. It's also important to communicate with local community organizations such as shelters and humane societies so that they know what you have planned. That way, they can dedicate their resources to address other community needs. They may also be willing to advertise your event to their audience.

You can make a big difference without spending a lot of money. While community outreach efforts are not typically meant to generate profit, no one ever said they had to be free! If you are hosting a vaccine or microchip event, you can offer the service for a discounted fee, and you may be able to negotiate a reduced purchase cost with your supplier, especially if you let them know about your planned event. If you plan a supply drive, you can recruit your team, clients, members of the community, and vendors to all make donations, reducing the burden on the practice.

Consider speaking or mentoring. You can speak at a school or community event, host a presentation at your practice on a pet care topic, or mentor students of varying ages who have an interest in a career in veterinary medicine.

Don't want to organize your own event?

You can find an outreach effort run by another organization and sign up as a volunteer! This eliminates the cost and time associated with planning your own event. It's also a great option for team members who want to get involved individually.





Resources

Language that works: Changing the way we talk about veterinary care

A resource created by the AVMA on effective client communication strategies that help clients better understand the value of veterinary visits.

findhelp.org

Find Help—Find free or reduced-cost resources like food, housing, financial assistance, health care, and more.

Veterinary social work sessions

Sign up for individual veterinary social work sessions from the University of Tennessee at Knoxville (for Tennessee residents, but they also provide referrals for residents in other states)

Financial resources and services for animal owners

A list of financial resources, low-cost pet services, and other community outreach services compiled by the University of Tennessee Center for Veterinary Social Work.

Veterinary Practice Payment Plan Simulation

Cornell Center for Veterinary Business and Entrepreneurship Veterinary Practice Payment Plan Simulator

Open Door Veterinary Collective

A resource for building sustainable business models and other resources that improve access to veterinary care within communities.



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