

Lighthouse and Multiple-Doctor Practices

Traditionally, multiple-doctor practices have utilized a minimal amount of relief service. Instead, they have found it preferable to work relatively short staffed with veterinarians, often describing the situation as, “Sucking it up in house.” In this new age of veterinary medicine, however, there is a better alternative.

The “new age of medicine” that I mentioned has many defining points, but is most completely expressed in the large, multiple-doctor practices that have developed. Examples include the increased expectations of the veterinary consuming public, increased awareness of the value of lay staff members, the importance of retaining new clients, and the importance of perceived value and client services. Multiple-doctor practices work on the concept of many different job descriptions and people working together in an interlocking dependant effort to deliver quality veterinary care, to maintain a high perceived value to the client, to maintain a reasonable work environment to the staff and veterinarians of the clinic, and to be a financial success.

Whenever the balance of manpower is disrupted in a multiple-doctor practice, the ability of the practice to serve its function is compromised, and there is probably no greater problem than the loss of a veterinarian from the front line. The ramifications of this loss occur at many levels such as:

- Decreased time spent with clients causing a diminished perceived value, and lower average transaction fees due to less marketing of services.
- Significantly less schedule flexibility to address situations such as emergency cases or surgeries, new clients wishing to be seen that day, and sick animals that need to be seen that day.
- Added stress to the remaining veterinarians and lay staff as they try to cover the existing workload with inadequate staffing or to reschedule clients to meet the practices’ needs.
- Increased lay staff costs as they work longer hours in support of the remaining veterinarians, this also decreases their job satisfaction as it interferes with personal lives.
- A subtle loss of clients who were necessarily rescheduled, had to wait longer than normal to be seen, were given inadequate time with a rushed, stressed veterinarian, or were forced to schedule appointments at times other than their choosing.

There was a time when clients’ expectations weren’t so high, when staff veterinarians accepted short-staffing situations better, when good associate veterinarians and lay staff members were easier to hire and retain, but those days are rapidly passing us by. In today’s market, who can afford the risks of inadequate veterinary staffing?

So what is the solution? Historically, the solutions were perhaps as difficult as the problem, i.e. locating, screening, retaining, and coordinating the scheduling and payment of independent relief veterinarians – many times on short notice – who you *hoped* would fit into your practice style. Fortunately, the “new age of veterinary medicine” has also brought a solution to this problem in the form of a new type of veterinary relief service, which hires and trains experienced veterinarians to be professional relief veterinarians, such as the Lighthouse Veterinary Personal Services, L.L.C.

With our experience and size, Lighthouse can handle all of your relief needs, from long staff transitions to vacations. Many times we are even available on short notice for personal emergencies and illnesses – the times when you need relief help the most. In addition to this, we are very easy to use; one phone call and we handle the coordination of our associates to meet your needs, and with no payroll hassle since we are probably the only true independent contractors in the relief market today. That means one bill from our group with **no payroll taxes, fringe benefits, or overtime pay!**

Multiple-doctor practices have an even greater opportunity for a beneficial relationship with a quality relief service like Lighthouse in two ways. First, your clients are generally comfortable seeing a new or different veterinarian since this happens frequently in multiple-doctor practices. Additionally, due to your frequent *routine* relief needs, such as **continuing education, sick leaves, maternity leaves, vacations, and staff transitions** (the time between when an associate veterinarian leaves your practice and their replacement starts) there are many times each year when your clinic is routinely functioning at less than optimal efficiency.

In summary, multiple-doctor practices have both numerous instances where they need relief help, and a multitude of reasons why bringing in an experienced professional relief veterinarian will be of benefit to them. Due to the sporadic, an often times, short notice and/or long-term needs of the multiple-doctor practices, your relief needs can best be met by the experienced, professional relief veterinarians of the Lighthouse Veterinary Personal Services, L.L.C.