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## MAXIMIZING YOUR RELIEF EXPERIENCE WITH LIGHTHOUSE VETERINARY PERSONNEL SERVICES®

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We have found that many of our clients have limited experience using a relief veterinarian or service. To assist you in receiving the best possible service from Lighthouse we offer the following suggestions.

First, we find it helpful to think of the veterinary relief experience in four stages. The important parts of each stage are outlined, and if needed, are discussed later.

### *PREPARATION*

- Sign and return your work agreement
- Schedule your relief needs
- Complete and return Client Information Request form
- Check schedules emailed from Lighthouse office for any additional relief coverage dates
- Share information in this document with key staff members
- Prepare your clients to be seen for re-evaluations by the relief veterinarians

### *TRANSITION TO LIGHTHOUSE COVERAGE*

- Rely on staff members to ease transition
- Be sure patient records are complete
- Contact us prior to service to discuss critical or difficult cases or surgeries or leave notes

### *RELIEF PERIOD*

- Proper patient scheduling
- Proper communications with the clients
- Good and open communications between the staff and the relief veterinarian

### *EVALUATION*

- Consult with staff and clients
- Go to our web site to comment on your relief experience with Lighthouse

### CLIENT INFORMATION SHEET

We have designed this form to help avoid potential problems. Please answer every question, and make any additional comments that you feel are important for the relief veterinarians to know (i.e. fear-free practice).

### UPDATED SCHEDULES

Current schedules will be emailed every Friday, as DVM availability can often change from week to week. We prefer 2 email addresses to be provided in order to increase the likelihood that schedules are received and checked for accuracy or changes. Please check the schedule each week to avoid miscommunication.

### PREPARING KEY STAFF FOR RELIEF COVERAGE

This is **the most important step** to ensure that everything goes smoothly in your absence. The following topics should be discussed:

- ❖ **General information:** Go over the relevant areas of the Client Information Sheet, making sure all involved staff members know their roles.

It is extremely important to realize that every veterinarian is different. While we pride ourselves on our flexibility, there will be some differences, such as treatment choices, practice style, communication, suture choices, etc. Many staff members we encounter have worked with only a few veterinarians and therefore lack the experience to realize this important level of variation. Make sure the staff grasps the principle that **the relief veterinarian will be different—not right or wrong, not better or worse—simply different**. If the staff is

uneasy with something the relief DVM is doing or has done, it should always be mentioned. We are happy to explain our actions, and this also helps us to “fit in” to your practice.

The staff will run the clinic. They will schedule appointments, enforce policies, inform the relief doctor of what needs to be done and accompanying time constraints, enter charges into your software system, and take payments. The relief veterinarian is in charge of the medicine, but information on policies, re-evaluation procedures, referrals, etc. will be welcomed and actively sought. If possible, a knowledgeable staff member should be available during appointments to help with these areas and to assist the relief DVM.

- ❖ **Communication with Clients:** Be sure all clients understand that they will be seen by the relief veterinarian who is substituting for the regular DVM. It is important for the staff to express confidence in the relief veterinarian's abilities in order to reassure the client and start the visit on a positive note.

The staff will usually be the first to know of any problems that a client might have with the relief DVM. Many times a problem has to do with practice style or confidence. In these instances, positive reinforcement from a trusted staff member can go a long way. Any problem should always be reported to the relief doctor; remember that you are on the same team with the same goals, and staff feedback is what allows good relief DVMs to “fine tune” their practice style to better fit your practice.

- ❖ **Scheduling:** Generally we are very comfortable seeing one client every 20 minutes. Allowing additional time for very sick cases, multiple problems, multiple animals, or difficult clients is also recommended. Remember that a relief veterinarian requires additional time because of the need for more complete records, to allow time to introduce and familiarize themselves with new owners and pets, and to gain familiarity with the facility and policies.

Our veterinarians will have varying practice strengths and if possible, we recommend scheduling to utilize these (i.e., dental skills, surgery, exotic animals). In fact, this diversity of practice strengths is an advantage when using a relief service.

We suggest that appointments and surgeries not be overbooked if additional cases need to be seen or special clients accommodated. We recommend extending appointments so that other clients don't have to wait.

### STAFFING

The **clinic should be regularly staffed during the relief period.** This is extremely important, especially with key employees such as office managers and technicians, due to the relief DVM's strong dependence on the support staff.

### CLIENT RECORDS

For 2 weeks prior to the relief period, we recommend an emphasis on keeping complete medical records on any sick animals that are seen since we may need to re-evaluate these cases in your absence. While we can certainly re-evaluate cases with no records if necessary, the additional information allows us to do a more thorough job with greater continuity of care.

We make every attempt to keep very complete records, emphasizing our communications with clients. In paperless or paper-light practices, our doctors will enter patient information in the medical record with the assistance of a staff member who is familiar with the practice software.

While we constantly strive to work with the systems in place within a clinic, one variation should be made. In clinics with paper charts or any type of printed patient information, these records **should be left outside of the exam room** so that the relief DVM can review the record before entering.

### EVALUATION

We encourage our clients to review their relief experience with Lighthouse on our web site ([www.lighthousevet.com](http://www.lighthousevet.com)). Both positive and negative comments are welcomed, allowing us to work together to constantly improve our service to you and your clients.

### SCHEDULING LIGHTHOUSE

We commit to serve on a first-come, first-served basis. During peak times we may be totally booked months in advance; therefore, we recommend scheduling as soon as you are sure of your plans. However, do not hesitate to call on short notice should the need arise.

### PAPERLESS OR PAPER-LIGHT PRACTICES

Experience has shown that by far the most efficient way to utilize a relief DVM in a paperless practice is to assign a computer operator (often a veterinary assistant or technician) to work with the relief doctor. While your system may be very simple to use, a new operator may find it confusing. Struggling to acclimate to each different system we encounter may lead to delays and errors that inevitably cripple the relief doctor's effectiveness.

We have found that a brief orientation to your system's capabilities and utilization in your practice is appropriate. With this information we can efficiently interface with the computer operator. This also liberates us to properly focus our time and efforts on treating patients and communicating with your clients. **Invoicing should always be done by a knowledgeable staff member.**

### LIGHTHOUSE MINIMUM SURGICAL REQUIREMENTS

Most of our relief veterinarians are comfortable performing surgery, and there are some practices that utilize our service exclusively for surgery days. While each practice has its own surgical style, there are some minimal requirements we adhere to in our surgical work:

- Sterile surgical gloves
- Sterile draping and sponges
- Instruments sterilized by an autoclave
- Sterile suture material of an appropriate size for the patient and procedure (range of 3-0 to 1 should suffice)
- Intravenous catheters, administration sets, and sterile fluids must be available to use on higher risk patients (as assessed by the DVM performing the surgery)
- A centrifuge and supplies to perform a hematocrit must be available on-site
- Endotracheal tubes for various sized patients
- A functional anesthesia machine with oxygen
- Emergency resuscitation drugs that are not outdated must be available on-site
- An anesthetic monitoring device
- A staff member who is either present or nearby and familiar with the devices in use

### ANESTHESIA

The flexibility of Lighthouse veterinarians, along with complete information on each clinic's Client Information Sheet, allows our relief doctors to use a variety of anesthetic protocols; however, the use of pre-mixed extra-label "cocktails" is discouraged.

### SURGICAL PROCEDURES

Most of our relief veterinarians are comfortable performing routine surgeries such as spays, neuters, tumor removals, and dentals, and many of our DVMs perform a wide range of procedures. We recommend that you contact our office before scheduling a less common procedure for the relief veterinarian, or if scheduling laser surgery.