

Lecture V - The Business of Dermatology: Developing a Team Approach

General: There is no one correct way to recommend how to implement or promote a dermatology center or service in a hospital, market the new services, and promote the care to the client base. Every hospital is different and therefore every approach must also be unique based on the needs of the practice, their staff and clientele. The goal of this lecture is to provide an overview of how to emphasize existing dermatology and otitis care programs into the hospital culture, educate the staff, market the program competitively and promote the program to the clients. In order to make necessary changes in any hospital program, the following components are necessary:

1. The goals of the program must be defined. Goals should be finite and attainable.
2. Evaluate the commitment of the staff to dermatology
3. Discuss goals and needs for the program with the entire medical team in order to:
 - a. Develop equipment list for new services
 - b. Develop Staffing Needs and Job Description
 - c. Develop Educational Programs for all new services and equipment
4. Determine if the new services are competitively priced and realistic for the market.
5. Develop educational client educational programs and literature
6. Implement the program
7. Celebrate success

If the medical team does not take a systematic approach to the implementation of any program, change cannot be made.

Step I – Hospital Teams Must Understand and Agree Upon Goals

The hospital leadership (i.e. Owner / Veterinarian, Office Manager, Lead Technician) must meet and outline the goals for their dermatology care. These goals may take many forms including proper clinical diagnostics accomplished, client follow up appointments are maintained and treatment plans are followed, increase client satisfaction, and increase price per transaction on otitis / dermatology cases. Before writing down the goals, the first best step is to write a mission statement with the hospital team. Then, when developing a list of goals,

these guidelines should be finite (3-5 total goals), measurable and understandable by all employees and clients. For example:

The Virtual Veterinary Hospital will be expanding its medical services for the treatment of otitis. The goals of this service are:

- 1. All new dermatology patients will have a thorough medical history obtained (via Medical History Form, have a skin scrape, and a dermatophyte culture completed.*
- 2. All Otitis patients have the following services completed at each visit; ear cytology, ear cleaning, and culture sensitivity.*
- 3. The average price per transaction for dermatology / otitis cases will increase by 15%.*
- 4. The client rechecks for dermatology / otitis cases will be 75%.*
- 5. An increase in client satisfaction for chronic otitis and dermatology cases.*

The first three goals are specific and can be evaluated quantitatively by monitoring end of day sales and record review. The last goal can be monitored by client survey and input as the new services are offered. Once implemented, each goal should be measured and followed through the course of implementation.

Step II: Evaluating the commitment of the medical team:

The next step for the medical leadership is to evaluate the hospital team and understand where the hospital team's commitment and understanding of. If the medical leadership cannot obtain an understanding of the hospital team's views of a program or service, **they will not be able to adequately get support from the hospital team or effect any change.** To truly evaluate the medical culture, specific questions should be asked; examples of these questions are:

- Do we truly care about providing dermatologic services to our patients or is it just something we do?
- How does the team evaluate all patients for dermatology care?

- How do we obtain history?
- What clinical diagnostics are standard for an Otitis or Dermatology patient?
- How is the client educated on otitis / dermatology, the treatment, the treatment protocols and the client commitment?
- How is the client scheduled and reminded for the next appointment/
- Would a client receive the same consistent information if they spoke with one receptionist or another? One technician to another?

Although there are many ways to get answers to these questions, it is important to listen to each member of the veterinary team. To accomplish this, it is recommended that the medical leadership have the medical team (i.e. Veterinarians, Technical and Reception Team) take part in a questionnaire (See example).

The questionnaire can be completed in written or electric medium. Once completed, the medical leadership should evaluate all answers and share them with the hospital team.

Consistency of service, client education and communication are key elements to the success of any program. Hospitals with successful dermatology compliance programs are educated and want to practice exceptional care. The reception team can answer to routine and focused questions on general ear problems and routine fees. Medical team members can educate clients on otitis / dermatology protocols, ear cleanings, and specific findings. The team members work constantly to advance their skills in a learning and growth environment. Chronic otitis / dermatitis cases are complicated; it is possible to be ineffective at treating the patient without consistent client communication.

Once the medical leadership understands the commitment and knowledge of their team members, the hospital team should discuss the importance of their long term commitment of care and treatment.

EXAMPLE - Dermatology Program Feedback Questionnaire

Employee Name:

Job Title:

The purpose of this form is to help stimulate thought and focus towards increasing compliance. Data from this and other Compliance Worksheets may be summarized and delivered to hospital leadership.

Please list the services and / or products included that are included in a chronic ear patient at this hospital:

Instructions for completing this form: Place only one “x” in the appropriate box for each of the relevant issues.

Product/Service Information:	Outstanding	Good	Marginal	Poor
1. I understand the product/Service and appropriate applications.				
2. I have been trained on how to use/sell product/Service.				
3. I use the product the product/Service for my own pets.				

Comments:

Service Pricing and Delivery:	Outstanding	Good	Marginal	Poor
1. I understand the service and why we provide it to the client.				
2. I feel the service is fairly priced to the client.				
3. I feel confident in discussing the service with clients.				
4. I am knowledgeable on current service delivery frequency.				
5. I understand current service delivery Goals – expectations.				
6. I have ideas on how to increase the service frequency.				

Comments:

Planning and Compliance Management:	Outstanding	Good	Marginal	Poor
1. Goals surrounding increasing product/sales compliance are realistic.				

2. Goals and projects surrounding increasing compliance are clear and well defined				
3. I understand my role and responsibilities regarding increasing compliance.				
4. We have clearly outlined how we will track our progress.				
5. I understand the timeline in which we have decided to track our progress towards increasing compliance.				

Comments:

Step III – Developing and reinforcing dermatology services with the medical team

Once the program goals have been defined, the hospital leadership should present the new service plan to the entire medical team. **This is an essential part of having a successful program.** The medical leadership should outline the importance of the services and work with the entire hospital to define what will be needed for the program’s success.

The first step is for the medical team must develop equipment and education needs list. The need for equipment and materials will be dependent on what services the medical team will offer. Equipment needs may vary dependent on the service offered and the equipment already owned by the hospital.

The second step is to develop an outline of staff responsibilities and services that should be done each time a patient presents for treatment of ongoing dermatology and otitis. An example of responsibilities for a recheck appointment is as follows:

1. 2 days prior to exam – Receptionist recall client and confirms appointment
2. Day of appointment –
 - a. Reception checks appointment in
 - b. Gets a brief medical history
 - c. Determines if client feels pet is doing better

3. Technical Team Member
 - a. Check client into room
 - b. Confirms History
 - c. Obtains Sterile Curette and Cytology Sample
 - d. Sets of Otoscope / Video Otoscope
4. After Exam by Veterinarian
 - a. Technician performs light ear cleaning
 - b. Discusses changes in medication – if there are any
 - c. Discusses need for next recheck appointment
 - d. Receptionist schedules appointment and sets up a recall or letter reminder for 7 days.

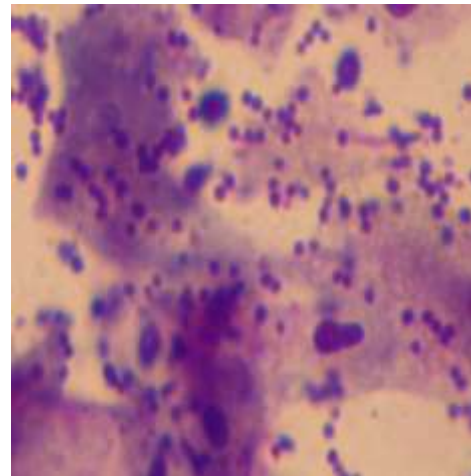
The third step is to develop education programs and program tools for the entire staff. This is more time consuming and harder to accomplish, since an educational curriculum must be outlined and developed for all new services and new equipment. If the team members are not knowledgeable, they will not be able to perform the necessary duties, discuss treatments with clients, and above all BELIEVE in the services the hospital provides. Time for training for the entire hospital team can be accomplished as meeting time during the day when ALL TEAM MEMBERS participate in training. Training may include both topics of veterinary medicine and instrumentation. An example of one curriculum for otology may be:

1. **Understanding Chronic Otitis**
2. **Clinical Diagnostics of Otitis – Practicing Cytology**
3. **Treating the Chronic Otitis Patient**
4. **Handling and Cleaning of the Video Otoscope**

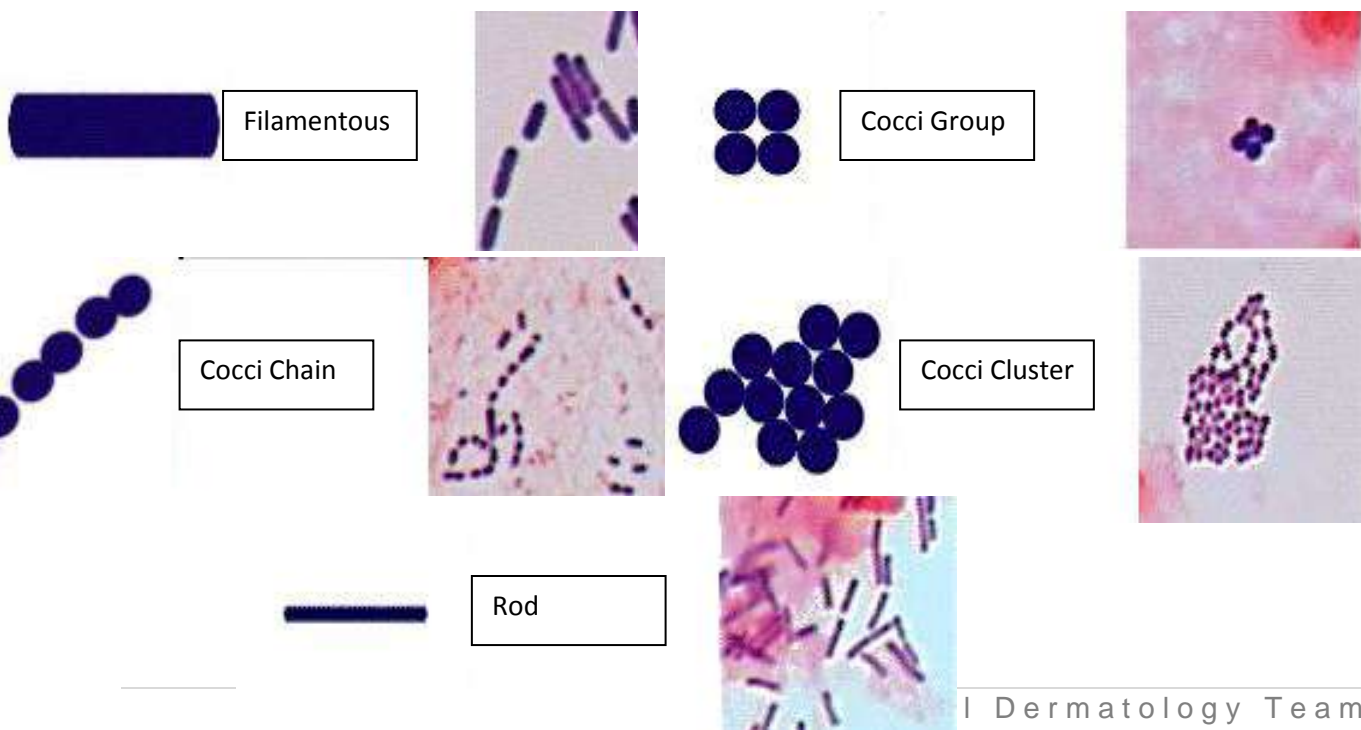
The goal of this training is that all member of the team must participate in training and mastering the listed skills. Hospital leadership should develop these programs, schedule time for training, evaluate employees on their mastery of skills, and offer interactive rounds which allow team members to test their knowledge.

Further developing tools for the technical team to utilize in evaluating each chronic otitis / dermatology patient helps standardize the evaluatory process and make it easier to identify patients that are not responding the therapy. One example of a systematic evaluation tool is to set up a system of evaluating ear cytology, for example:

- Bacteria
 - 1 + rare to scattered
 - 2 + many in every field
 - 3 + difficult to count
 - 4 + almost pure bacterial sample



Bacteria Observed:



Developing these training programs do not just help the current medical team, but also help to create training curriculum and standardization for new employees.

Step IV – Determining the Market for Dermatology Care

To perform exceptional service, offer new services, and obtain better equipment, the hospital team needs to charge appropriate fees. Each hospital team's services and expertise can vary; however, pricing for the common components of dermatology care should be competitive. Further, hospital leadership should also investigate how care is being discussed at competing hospitals. To get a data base of expense and services being offered, survey calls to other veterinary hospitals to discuss a "pet" that may need chronic otitis or dermatology care.

Step V – Developing Client Education Material

It is important to let clients know how committed your hospital is to training and offering newer technologies and treatment options. Communication that the hospital will be closed for specific in-hospital training seminars and their importance should be discussed with the client. Further, letter or pamphlets advertising the new programs and training can be created to demonstrate the hospital team's commitment to pet health. Making printed or digital material available to clients on newer services can help clients better understand their options.

Although, all discussion of diagnosis, testing and treatment start with the veterinarian, often clients rely on other sources of information to help them understand what is affecting their pet. Many times clients are unable to fully understand the disease process that is going on at the time of examination. Therefore, having the medical team develop continuing education material that the client can review once at home is extremely beneficial. Some recommendations for client educational material are:

- 1. Create or obtain client handouts for medical conditions:** There are many sources for good client educational handouts available. Some of the best information can be created by your staff with specific information for the client. Creating handouts and brochures can help the client read and understand disease conditions to help them make an educated decision.

- 2. Utilize your publishing resources:** Creating a monthly or quarterly news letter or web page that can outline dermatology concerns based on the season or region and outlines how to identify if a pet is having skin and ear issues can be a resource to your clients and can advertise your new services. There are many web page and word processing programs that can produce professional results.

Step VI- Implementation

Once training programs are put into place, the medical team must allow time for all members of the hospital to master their new responsibilities or procedures. **It is of the utmost importance for veterinarians to work closely with the staff to maintain the goal standards of the program.** The management team should set aside a set amount of time to educate, evaluate, and communicate all of the expectations the hospital team agreed upon to implement. Once all members have demonstrated understanding and have become responsible for their role in the new program, full implementation can begin.

The management team should define quantitative measurements to help decide if the new program is successful. These measures can be broken down into several parameters and should be defined by the initial goals of the program. For possible measures can be:

- Financial: Average cost of transactions
- Exams: % of clients seen on recheck exam, clinical diagnostics completed on ear examination
- Survey: Client Satisfaction

Once the medical team has been trained, the equipment purchased, continuing educational material created, the measures in place, and the program implemented, it is important to give the program time to be successful. The management team should allow the program a set period of time (6-12 months) to see if the changes have met the program goal expectation. Unless there is a serious unforeseen element, the program should have a full period of time without any changes.

During Implementation and at the end of this interval, the quantitative parameters should be evaluated to see if their goals were met. The entire medical team should have input on how

the program is working and if any changes should be made. If changes are made, the same implementation process should be started again.

Step VII: Celebrating Success

With any implementation programs, it is important to celebrate success of a project when goals have been achieved. This honors the hard work and commitment of the veterinary team to develop this program as part of the hospital culture. Important points when developing a rewards program are the administrative leadership should:

1. Ask the team what they would like for a reward – don't assume you know
2. Make it simple and well defined.
3. Make it visually present in the hospital (outside of customer view).
4. Make it easily calculated by each team member
5. Report sales back to the team in a timely manner
6. Should update the goals frequently and modify them if appropriate

It is the hospital leadership team's responsibility to make sure communication regarding the reward program is completed. If it's not important to you it won't be important to the rest of the team. Another concept is that many vendors will set aside money to support hospital reward programs during their annual budgeting process. Approach your vendors to support any product specific based compliance reward program. Service programs can also be vendor supported if an associated product is sold or used in conjunction with the service. Think outside the box and make it a win-win situation for the hospital and vendor.

When the program has finalized and the changes to the program have become a part of the culture, the administrative team should finalize all changes in the hospital's standard operating procedure manual. All protocols should be recorded and be included as a part of new hire training.