Dentistry – Keys to Success

by Annie Mills, LVT, VTS (Dentistry) – Pacific Veterinary Conference Speaker

Dentistry is challenging even for most dental practices for a number of different reasons but when approached properly, dentistry can be the most rewarding and lucrative department within a practice.

The Team Approach
A successful dental department starts with an enthusiastic dental team. Identify the dental “superstars” within the practice—those team members that embrace dentistry and are eager to learn and do more to achieve a high standard of care. Invest in dentistry continuing education for those select individuals instead of the entire staff, which can sometimes be counterproductive. This dental team can be as small as one veterinarian and one technician or may include multiple veterinarians and multiple technicians. Once the team or teams are established, consistency becomes key to allow for more efficient communication and execution of procedures.

The Dental Operatory
Minimum equipment requirements for appropriate dental care should include a dental wet table (with an ergonomic cut out to be able to sit with knees under the table), digital dental x-ray, high and low speed delivery system, and an ultrasonic scaler. The operatory does not have to be elaborate, but functionality is important.

Skill Set
A skilled dental technician keeps the case moving forward and is an integral part of the dental team. The skills necessary for this position include dental radiology, regional block placement, knowledge of common oral pathology, dental charting, hand instrumentation and periodontal therapy, and effective client education. Veterinarians need to be efficient in interpreting dental x-rays, periodontal therapy, and surgical extractions.

Quality Not Quantity
Anesthetizing patients, cleaning the teeth, and recovering in order to get as many cases done as possible is a pitfall that many practices fall into, especially during Pet Dental Health Month. Without a complete assessment including dental radiology, pathology is missed and subsequently, not treated. Assessment and treatment are the standard of care for appropriate dentistry. If pathology is found early, there are procedures available that can save teeth. When pathology is allowed to progress undetected, the window of opportunity for treatment closes. Extraction becomes the only treatment option. Dental patients benefit more from a complete assessment and treatment plan which can take more time than just a “dental cleaning.” Scheduling a total of three to four patients a day is recommended until the dentistry service becomes more efficient.

How to Get There
Veterinarians and technicians should engage in dental continuing education in order to master the skills needed for an effective dental team. Hands on wet labs in radiology positioning, periodontal therapy and hand instrumentation, regional nerve block placement, and surgical extractions for veterinarians are available throughout the country. Lectures and online webinars are available to veterinary staff as well. The practice of these skills with cadaver specimens is essential. Cadaver specimens provide a “no-pressure” learning environment as opposed to an anesthetized patient.

Invest in equipping the dental operatory properly. Conference exhibit halls are great resources to view and learn about the latest products and equipment available.

The Benefits of a Great Dentistry Service
The opportunity for increased revenue for the practice and return on investment is tremendous with an effective dentistry service. Periodontal disease is extremely prevalent, so the majority of patients coming through any...
PacVet 2017 Technician Events

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**Tech Tips**

The following tech tips were submitted by Laressa Lum, RVT, RLATG from Carrington College, San Jose and Alison Gottlieb, CVT, from Center for Animal Referral and Emergency Services.

- **Use small plastic drawer organizers to place blood tubes, needles, syringes, and a bandage for the day’s appointments.**
  - Laressa Lum, RVT, RLATG

- **When placing IV catheters or performing venipuncture, start as distal as possible on the limb. This leaves room just in case it does not go well.**
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**Tech Tips**

**Technician Track**
The PacVet 2017 technician track will offer 28.5 hours of technician-specific CE. This year’s topics include anesthesia, surgery, infection control, feline medicine, dentistry, and emergency critical care.

**Speakers**

- Alison Gottlieb, BS, CVT, VTS (ECC)
- Annie Mills, LVT, VTS (Dentistry)
- Louise O’Dwyer, MBA BSc (Hons), VTS (Anesthesia/Analgesia & ECC), DipAVN (Medical & Surgical), RVN
- Andrea Steele, MSc, RVT, VTS (ECC)

**Technician Fair**

**Saturday, July 1**

**Presentation: 5:45 PM–6:30 PM**

**Wellness for You!**
The Technician Fair features a presentation by Linda Markland, RVT, on wellness and preventive care for the veterinary professional, followed by a technician exhibit hall. There will be raffle prizes, appetizers, and a no-host bar. This event is limited to veterinary technicians and veterinary assistants only.

**Exhibits: 6:30 PM–7:30 PM**

**Some tabletop exhibitors include:**

- Academy of Veterinary Dental Technicians (AVDT)
- Academy of Veterinary Nutrition Technicians (AVNT)
- Hill’s Pet Nutrition, Inc.
- JustFoodForDogs
- Merial
- National Association of Veterinary Technicians (NAVTA)
- Stanbridge College
- Veterinary Allied Staff Education (VASE)
- Veterinary Insurance Services Company (VISC)

Sponsored by Veterinary Allied Staff Education (VASE), Veterinary Insurance Services Company (VISC), JustFoodForDogs, Merial, and Hill’s Pet Nutrition, Inc.

For more information on these events, visit PacVet.net.

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**Dentistry continued from page 50:**

Dentistry can be very rewarding because the benefit to the patient can be seen immediately. Owners are happy because their pet is happier. Patients that are treated appropriately are relieved of the pain that they have been living with for months or, in some cases, years. With treatment, many owners note that their older pets are acting like youngsters again. They had no idea they were suffering. After all, the goal for veterinary professionals has always been to provide a high standard of care to keep our patients healthy and happy and creating a great dentistry service is a step in the right direction.

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