

## Veterinary Hospital Managers' Association - 2007 Annual Meeting and Conference

### DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING PROTOCOLS

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Protocols are various tasks and performance guidelines created by managers and/or owners. They are also the expectations of management on how to get a particular job done. These protocols are sometimes verbally stated and other times in written format. Let's get this out of the way right now: **PROTOCOLS ARE NOT PROTOCOLS UNLESS THEY ARE IN WRITING.** It's the same concept as when medical recommendations or instructions are not documented; if it's not written in the records, it didn't happen.

There are times protocols are not followed leaving management frustrated and wondering why. There are multiple answers as to why protocols are not followed, including but not limited to:

- No one ever told me.
- The way we were doing it before was fine.
- I didn't understand the protocol so I just did it my way.
- Susie does it another way and doesn't get into trouble, so I'll do it any way I want too.
- Dr. Smith (the owner) doesn't follow it, why should I?

To effectively implement protocols, there are three basic guidelines that need to be followed:

1. Assure all DVMs are in agreement with the protocol and abide by it. Often times, a protocol is adhered to by one DVM, while another one prefers to do it his/her own way, thus causing confusion. An example would be vaccine protocols. If a client questions what the basic vaccine protocols are, will they get two different answers from two DVMs in the same practice?

If the answer to that question is yes, you will have a problem implementing protocols. In order to assure effective protocol implementation, the first step is to have all the DVMs and owner or hospital director, if they are not a DVM, set up a meeting outside the practice and hash out what the vaccine protocols should be for the practice. This is creating a common voice.

In the case where a protocol is to be written and implemented and it does not affect DVMs, it is not necessary to hold an outside meeting. The practice manager and owner/hospital administrator can reach an agreement between them as to what the protocol will be.

However, if the protocol is in any way related to patient care, all DVMs, whether actively involved in management or not need to be present at the meeting to have their input into the new protocol, which could potentially change the way they practice medicine.

2. Once all DVM members and/or owner and hospital administrator have agreed upon the protocol, one member of the meeting is to bring this information back to the practice manager.
3. Now it's up to the practice manager to implement the protocol. Remember, a protocol is not a protocol unless it is in writing. The practice manager is to put the new protocol in writing and give it back to the person who provided her/him with it for editing to assure the new protocol was captured properly.
4. Once the actual writing and editing of the protocol has been completed, it's time to implement the new protocol. In order to assure compliance, we suggest implementing new protocols at mandatory staff meetings rather than memos so someone is unable to say they "never received the memo".

At the time of the staff meeting, handouts of the written protocol should be passed out to EVERYONE, whether you think it will affect them or not. After the handout, read the written protocol aloud. Ask for feedback and questions to make sure everyone is clear on the new protocol.

Now for the hardest part, after everyone is clear on the new protocol, a statement should be made at the end of the process, which states something to the effect that the new protocol is expected to be adhered to. If it is not disciplinary steps will be taken up to and including termination.

We are aware this end sentence sounds harsh and may put a bad taste in your mouth when implementing protocols, but it is a necessity. Good employees, appreciate you holding ALL employees responsible for their work performance. There have been cases where good employees left practices because of lack of accountability. They thought, why bother, I'll just get a job somewhere else where I'm appreciated and all employees are equally accountable.

If you are unwilling to enforce the protocol, be aware creating protocols may be a poor use of your time. Not only is a protocol not a protocol if it's not in writing, but it's also not a protocol if it will not be enforced.