

The use of a technician in the exam room is an integral part of a 21st century workflow. The technician acts as a liaison between the front office team, the technical team, and the doctor and an advocate for the client and patient to ensure an optimal client experience. From client and patient check in to release, the pet owner has somebody assisting them along the way and is never left alone for any significant period of time. Additionally, the front office team can focus on their tasks and not face the laser eyes of a pet owner sitting in the waiting room staring at them. Their 'right hand person' keeps the doctor to task ensuring an effective and efficient operation.

Thus, the ongoing debate as to whether to keep an assistant in the exam room with the doctor is over. In looking at a number of tangible and intangible benefits, they far outweigh the major position of the opposition—I can't afford to. In reality, you can't afford NOT to. Here's 5 reasons why:

Efficiency

Keeping a doctor on time and thus impacting the entire flow of the hospital is quite a challenge. Whether the client is a talker or the doctor is a schmoozer, it doesn't take much to burn through the allotted 20 or 30 minutes appointment slot. It is rare that a doctor will look at their watch and gauge the time left or notice that another client has arrived and is staged in the lobby or another exam room. The technician is the time keeper, flow maintainer and allows for the doctor and client to chat while they can help expedite any hands on or technical treatments needed.

Envision this: The doctor says: Mrs. Jones, while you and I continue to talk, Kathy will take Fluffy back and get the treatments taken care of. She'll be right back with Fluffy and your medications and invoice. That will give us more time to discuss _____ (fill in the blank). Kathy can take Fluffy back for vaccinations, ear clean, blood test, etc. Fluffy gets handed to a technicians to take care of the treatments while Kathy creates the invoice, fills the prescriptions, and gets the client information handouts. Kathy re-collects Scruffy and returns to the room. Kathy goes over the medications, go home instructions, and invoice. Kathy can even collect payment in the exam room. At the end, Kathy says, Mrs. Jones, if you have any questions about how Fluffy is doing give me a call, here's my card, and I'll be more than happy to help you out. The doctor remains on time...the treatments get done and ALL of Mrs. Jones questions are answered. Value comes from the perception of the client of never being left alone.

Education and Communication

Too often, the doctor is so busy being a doctor that the information shared is never translated into understandable bite size pieces for the owner. This is one of the technician's roles. By making sure the client understands Doctor-speak and providing clearly written handouts on the condition under treatment or the wellness needs, the client never leaves feeling confused. Value for clients come from being engaged at a level they can understand and listened to. The assistant helps the doctor by listening to the client as well. Many lawsuits are the result of communication issues, along with the DVM the assistant's role is to make sure that the client completely understands why what is being

done is needed; why it is important; what it means for the comfort, life expectancy, health, etc., of the pet. And most importantly to be the person that the client can call at anytime for questions because we all know how 'busy' the doctor is.

Client Service

I challenge anybody reading this to give FREE OFFICE VISITS to anybody who waits longer than ten minutes from their appointment time (assuming the client is on time) to see the doctor. One of the greatest signs of disrespect of one individual to another is to make them wait. When a client arrives, based upon the size of the magazine or book (Harry Potter's Seventh Book; War and Peace), you can determine how long they expect to wait. Do you have the community reputation of the Reading Room Veterinary Hospital because people are sitting their lost in their novels? Or, are you respectful of your client's time.

The exam room assistant's role, as noted above, is to keep things flowing. By working out a communication system between the doctor and assistant, the doctor can be kept on time and moving from room to room. The client is never left alone for any extended periods. Client service is a lot of intangibles. Never keeping a client waiting (or alone) for any extended period of time is one of them. Clients perceive value from this as well. You can be the butt of Yelp reports for making clients wait and then making them feel rushed. Or, you can be the leader in the community by making clients feel that you respect and listen to them. The assistant's role as time keeper is invaluable.

Medical Records

Whether paper or electronic, nobody really enjoys writing or typing up records. So, why continue to do so? Your Exam Room Assistant can be your transcription nurse. Think about the following. The Assistant, using a template of questions, collects a set of history questions and some objective information such as TPR, weight, Body Condition Score, Dental grade and enters this all into the medical records. The Doctor comes in and continues the conversation. BUT, instead of either having to remember or turning away from the client during this phase of data collection, the technician is diligently transcribing the pertinent and relevant aspects into the medical records.

Upon completion of the history, the doctor verbally walks the client and Assistant through the examination---Eyes look good; Left ear is fine; Right ear---canal is very red, large amount dark yellow waxy debris with yeast like odor; can't see ear drum; Heart and lungs sound fine; etc. Two things that are great here---the client gets to hear what you are seeing during the examination; the assistant acts as your memory by documenting the examination into the record. Including your tentative diagnosis and treatment plan which becomes your invoice and prescriptions and release instructions and...and...and...and...and the only thing, you the doctor has to do is review what the assistant typed and initial it or sign it as complete. Besides, it is probably more legible than any doctor's handwriting. This transcription can be done with hospitalized cases as well. No piles of charts at the end of the day. And a well trained assistant will ask doctors questions such as---when do you want us to call Mrs. Smith back; would you like

to do a recheck; etc. And, if this use of the assistant isn't beneficial enough, the final point pays for the assistant many times over.

Missed Charges

In the hustle and bustle of being a veterinarian, things fall through the cracks. When those things are services or products that should be provided, dispensed, and charged for, you are taking money out of the pockets of everybody on the healthcare team. In the medical record discussion above, the dictation of the physical examination moves to dictation of the treatment plan for the day. The treatment plan becomes a healthcare plan (aka Estimate). It is estimated that in the average veterinary hospital, 20% of charges are either not recorded, not performed, not paid for, etc., That is a very significant number.

By dictating the treatment plan, the technician now knows exactly what needs to be done—ear cleaning; ear smear; medications to go home based upon the smear; when recheck is to be done; when a call back is to occur; etc. Not only that, the assistant will translate this into invoice items that will be paid. How often have you forgotten to charge for the ear smear or charged inappropriately for the ear cleaning or forgot to schedule the recheck because as the doctor you are already thinking about the next room when you leave the current room and thus forget to perform and charge for the requested nail trim. The exam room assistant is responsible for making sure that EVERYTHING that the client wants and the patient needs as well as EVERYTHING that the doctor plans for the patient are taken care of. EVERYTHING. And not only taken care of, but charged for. It is not wrong for the Assistant to ask the doctor during the treatment plan discussion, you want me to do an ear smear as well don't you? Or Mrs. Jones also brought a fecal in with her today. Or...

So, think about it...if each exam room assistant can help you catch 20% more services, let's say you could add \$100k to your income, would that pay for an exam room assistant...and a new car?

So, don't tell me you can't afford to keep an assistant in the room with you. Tell me how much they make for you!!

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