LIGHTHOUSE
VETERINARY PERSONNEL SERVICES

## HOW TO USE LIGHTHOUSE VETERINARY PERSONNEL SERVICES®

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. Many of the topics we discuss reflect the proper attitudes and communications for working with relief veterinarians.

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

*PREPARATION*
- Schedule your relief needs
- Arrange a Staff Meeting
- Complete and return Client Information Request form
- Prepare your clients to be seen for re-evaluations by the relief veterinarian

*TRANSITION TO LIGHTHOUSE COVERAGE*
- Rely on staff members to ease transition
- Contact us prior to service to discuss critical or difficult cases or leave notes with the records

*RELIEF PERIOD*
- Proper scheduling
- Proper communications with the clients
- Proper communications between the staff and the relief veterinarian

*TRANSITION FROM LIGHTHOUSE COVERAGE*
- Records left for immediate review
- Staff to ease transition

*EVALUATION*
- Consult with staff and clients
- Complete and return evaluation form

### *STAFF MEETING*

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

- General information: Go over the relevant areas of the Client Information Sheet (CIS), 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. Most staff members we encounter have worked with only the practice owner 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 last general point to understand is that the staff will run the clinic. They will schedule the appointments, enforce policies, inform the relief doctor of what needs to be done and accompanying time constraints, 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: **Always be sure all clients understand that they will be seen by the relief veterinarian.** It is extremely important for the staff to express 100% confidence in the relief veterinarian's ability 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. All problems should always be reported to the relief doctor; remember that you are on the same team, with the same goals, and that 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 15 minutes. Double booking less time-consuming appointments is reasonable. 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 ourselves 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 INFORMATION SHEET*

We have designed this form to help avoid potential problems. Please answer every question. If there isn't a definite policy in some areas, let us know and explain how we should handle those situations. When referring hospitalized cases to a local practitioner, it is best to have this prearranged.

## *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 the case of sick animals, problem cases/clients, or euthanasia, we prefer to hold the records for immediate review upon your return. This allows you to be informed should questions or emergencies occur.

While we constantly strive to work with the systems in place within a clinic, one variation should be made. Client records **should be left outside of the exam room** so that the relief DVM can review the record before entering. While this change may seem somewhat disruptive for clinics where records are left for the doctor in the exam room, the benefits have proven to be well worth the effort.

## *EVALUATION FORMS*

Before completing the evaluation form we recommend consulting with your staff for their perceptions. We also suggest getting feedback from your clients during re-evaluation of our cases and review of our records.

The form provides areas for you to address any problems, to provide suggestions for improvement, and to highlight stand-out performances by relief doctors assigned to your practice. We are not only concerned about specific cases, but more importantly general trends or patterns. Both positive and negative comments are welcomed, allowing us to work together to constantly improve our service to you and your clients.

## *O.S.H.A. REQUIREMENTS*

The fundamental principle of O.S.H.A. regulations is that employers must inform employees of the risks involved in their particular workplace. The regulations clearly state that this responsibility also extends to contract laborers and independent contractors. As such, we urge you to allow adequate time at the onset of a relief day to appropriately orient your relief veterinarians to meet your standards of O.S.H.A. compliance.

## *SCHEDULING LIGHTHOUSE*

We commit to serve on a first-come, first-served basis. During peak times we may be totally booked weeks 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.

## *COMPUTERIZED PRACTICES*

Experience has shown that by far the most efficient way to utilize an relief DVM in a computerized 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 the treating of patients and communicating with your clients.