Creative Leveraging of Veterinary Support Staff

Brenda Tassava, CVPM
Broad Ripple Animal Clinic
Hours: Mon-Thurs 7am-8pm
Fridays 7am-6pm
Saturdays 8am-3pm

5 FTE DVMs
38 Support Staff
A Hospital Administrator and an Administrative Assistant

Small Animal Hospital
No Boarding or Grooming Services
“The Pod System”

- Dr. David Brunner created this system in the early 1990's.
- He created a self-contained “unit” of a central work station, a mini-pharmacy, and three exam rooms for each veterinarian to see patients, aided by a team made up of an RVT and an Assistant
Exam Rooms

- 3 exam rooms per pod
- Check-out in rooms
- Everything you need, not more than 3–4 steps away
- Room to run last, current, and next appointments
Appointments

- 20 minute appointments
- 40 minute appointments for puppy/kitten visits
- 40 minute appointments for new client or new patient visits
- 20 minute release appointments
Client Service

- 3 Client Service Representatives at front desk at all times
- Duties include managing 5 phone lines, greeting clients, OTC transactions, and medical record audits
- Scheduled 32-34 hrs/week
- 6:45am-2:00pm or 1:45pm-8:30pm, no lunch breaks (CSR Staff choice)
Benefits of the system

- Delegation of duties to the support staff
- CSRs devoted to managing the phones, greeting clients, and handling over-the-counter transactions
- DVMs can see more patients in less time
- Enhanced client service and satisfaction
Problems over time

- At some point, the RVT and the Assistant became “interchangeable”
- Hospital treatments, weekend treatment duties, and drop-off appointments
- Overtime
- Many “practices within a practice”
Quality of care inconsistencies

Tech appointments shifted to kennel staff

Release appointments with long wait times

Teams falling behind and unable to stay on time
Throw in a computer conversion from *%@!

- Computers in every exam room
- Paperless (less paper)
- CHANGE
The Good

- Newer staff able to learn new computer system much quicker than our previous system
- Lab results downloaded directly into patient medical record via the Internet
- DVM medical record-keeping better than ever (notes to chart, documenting telephone conversations, etc.)
The Bad

- RVTs are suddenly “glorified transcriptionists”
- Learning curve of existing staff led to increased overtime costs and low staff morale
- Appointments taking longer due to the curve-ball thrown into perceived “normal” appointment flow
- Pod burnout
The Ugly (duckling)

One year of almost constant turnover throughout the clinic
Step 1: Dental Hygienist

- Corry left BRAC in 2004 due to “pod burnout”
- Passion for dentistry brought her back as our Dental Hygienist
Before Corry

- Teams rotated weekly into surgery meant no consistency with dentals
- Time had to be blocked out of surgeon's schedule to allow RVT to perform dentals instead of monitoring anesthesia for surgery
- General dislike of performing dentals by RVTs
After Corry

- Clinic now has a “passion” for dentistry, driven by Corry and her motivation to perform them
- Consistent dental cleanings performed
- Scheduled M-F, 6:45 am-? (flexible)
- Paid hourly rate plus 5% commission for dental production
Step 2: Ward Technician

- Kristin lives more than 1 hour (one-way) from the clinic
- Indiana Veterinary Technician of the Year 2004–2005
- Main desire: to perform her duties as an RVT with excellence
Her Partner, Dawn

- 9-year BRAC employee
- 2005 BRAC Employee of the Year
- Finishes AAHA RVT distance learning program this semester and sat for her boards in January 2006
- Main desire: To be an excellent RVT, yet spend quality time with her husband who exclusively works day shifts
Ward Tech Duties

- Care for hospitalized pets, performing rounds and treatments every hour
- Drop-offs and overflow from appointments (radiographs)
- Supervision of kennel staff
- Technician appointments
- Release appointments
- Medication refills
Ward Tech Schedule

- 10 or 12 hour shifts, 3 days a week
- Alternate Saturdays with each other
- Lunch is paid break when time permits
- 8-8 M-Th, 8-6 Fridays, 8-4 Saturdays
Step 3: Surgery Tech

Lisa lives almost 1 hour (one way) from BRAC

Main desire: Consistent scheduling that will allow her to raise her teenaged step-daughter who needs constant after-school supervision.
Her Assistant, Tracy

- 6 years at BRAC
- Strengths: meticulous and conscientious
- Main desire: consistent schedule that rewards her loyalty and longevity
Consistent estimates, invoicing, discharge instructions and more!

Closely monitor all surgery times and communicate directly with Hospital Administrator when problems arise.

Schedule releases for the evening or next day.

Paired with the Dental Tech, they are able to devote more time to surgeon, allowing for a fuller surgery schedule.
Surgery Schedule

- M-F, 7:00 am to 3:00 pm
- Never have overtime
- Often finish early
- RVT assists surgeon with admissions, beginning at 7:00 am
- Assistant assures surgeon calls all clients immediately after procedure is finished
Step 4: Restructure the Pod System

- Teams transitioned to “all Assistants”, with 2 Assistants scheduled per DVM
- One RVT (partnered with another RVT to work opposite shifts) scheduled as Pod Tech to supervise and perform all technical duties for every scheduled team
- Typical day: 1 or 2 DVMs 8–4, and 2 DVMs 12–8 in appointments
Then:

- 5 teams of an RVT and an Assistant who worked 40+ hours each week (averaging 44 hours per employee)

- Every team had “their own way” of doing the pod system, following the lead of their assigned Associate DVM and their specific requests, etc.

- Lost appointment time and production whenever time was blocked out of a DVM’s schedule due to drop-offs, x-rays, etc.

- DVM ACT= $130.00 average
Now:

- 8 Assistants who work 3-4 days with a specific DVM and rotate their 5th shift with another DVM, with no overtime.
- 2 RVTs, working 10 or 12-hr shifts, 3 days each week, with no overtime.
- Assistants are hired for their client service and computer skills, with “desire to work with animals” a secondary trait.
- DVM ACT= $170.00 average.
RVTs monitor and supervise all teams, decreasing the “practice within a practice” syndrome. RVTs assure everyone does everything the same way!

RVTs are utilizing their technical and leadership skills 100% of the time; while Assistants focus on superior client service, computer data entry, client education, and restraint.
Appointments are now running “on-time” for the most part, as lengthy procedures are transferred to the Ward Technician, allowing the team to continue with their next appointment.

Higher “Staff:DVM” ratio, but payroll is actually lower, as a % of gross production (went from 27.8% to 26.6%, including benefits).

Younger Associate DVMs are “closing the gap” in terms of production because they now have more equality in support staff scheduling.
Most Important Outcomes

- Much happier staff who now know how much we value them, and respect their needs
- Turnover issues have disappeared
- 4 RVTs who drive an hour or more to work, only have to do it 3 days/week
- Client service has been enhanced via timely appointments and more personable Assistant staff, who devote their time and attention to the client and their pet
- Out of control payroll costs have come back into line with clinic goals
Feel free to visit BRAC in Indianapolis and see us in action, for yourself