

Best Practices for Utilization of Rehab Staff on SLOW DAYS

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A question was posed to me:

"I'm wondering if you have any ideas on how to better utilize our technician staff? I currently see my own appointments and perform my own treatments alongside the doctors and therapists. However, my schedule is sometimes lighter than the doctors, and aside from helping them with treatments, general maintenance of rehab equipment/upkeep of the clinic, assisting the front desk staff, etc., some days I'm at a loss of what to do. We have a "slow day" list, which includes call backs, researching journal articles, writing articles for our newsletter, coming up with ideas for lunch and learns, etc., but this feels like an under-utilization of my (and other) technician skills. How have you seen technicians better utilized in a practice setting? Thanks for any input!"

So I did a survey and received sixteen responses. I've compiled them here into categories.

Technicians do the therapy "Model"

Of the respondents 6 noted that they are set up in a typical model whereby the vets see the patient for the initial assessment, set up the plan, do any acupuncture / spinal manipulations or mobilizations, and recheck periodically. Therapy in these cases typically consisted of modalities, underwater treadmill, therapeutic exercises. Some respondents specifically identified soft tissue therapies as falling into this domain as well, massage in particular. One human PT noted that on the human side, PTA's are typically utilized for modality assistance and exercise supervision after the PT has established / prescribed the rehab program, and that the PTA would continue with the program and not modify treatments without first getting approval from the supervising therapist. Veterinary respondents indicated that this was similar for them as well. One respondent noted that their clinic utilizes a "Tag Team" model whereby the vet tech starts or finishes the appointment for the vet.

Customer Service

Customer service was another common response. It included answering phone calls and e-mails, performing client call backs at such intervals as after the initial assessment & treatment, a month after discharge, or any time a patient 'fall off' from therapy was noted. (PS. Some software programs can provide this report for you!) This was seen as an invaluable service!

Documentation

This category, I divided into "documenting" as in charts, progress notes, therapy status updates, boarding notes, etc., and "document creation". So the first category is self-explanatory. The second category was more interesting, and included: Home

exercise handouts; Training 'Standards of Practice' documents; creation of forms; Educational materials for referring DVMs; Creating questionnaires to handout to clients (i.e. pain questionnaires, mobility questionnaires); Creation of new treatment protocols; Creation of client education powerpoints (for presentation or for education in the waiting area); Create client educational / informational phone messages; and Writing articles.

Social Media

This I categorized on it's own, separate from program & promotions creation, because I think it is good (and useful) to think of it as a stand-alone, important task. Personally, I think this is uber useful and important. Taking pictures and videos of patients, and posting them on social media can drive a lot of attention to your clinic. Compiling these clips and videos can also be great for creating a short 'feature video'. You know the kind that gets shared by millions of people on Facebook, YouTube, or Intagram!!!! Learn how to schedule posts and promote posts, and really get your content noticed! As well, blogging not only provides good information, but will also drive people to your clinic's website, which helps it to rank higher with the search engines!

Create Programs & Promotions

You want to be busier? You want a caseload that is 'just for you'? Then build it! This to me is exciting. Some suggestions for programs included an osteoarthritis program, a geriatric program or class, weight loss programs, fitness training programs, client lecture series (i.e. such as Massaging your Pet, or How to adjust the house for a senior or post-operative pet), lectures for agility groups (warm up, cool down, sport massage, troubleshooting your dog issues), or to vet tech groups, etc. Lectures can be fun or informative. Ideally a mix of both is most desirable.

Promotions are finding things to group together, sell at a discount, or give away. One respondent said that she would phone product reps to get free products to give away. They a clinic could create a contest or a promotion around that item. Perhaps you have a laser special, a nail trim offer, an underwater treadmill discount package, or an exercise package on for one particular month. Why not create something unique each month? The more fun you have with it, the more attention you will create without even trying too hard!

The other item I'm putting into this category, simply because it's marketing, is going to other veterinary clinics. Meet with vets and/or the technicians, provide information, give presentations, and just be seen and noticed! It'll take multiple times of visiting, presenting, or dropping in for your referrals sources to start to think of you (and your clinic) as an option for their patients! So this is a great use of 'slow times'!

Research and Learning

This was brought up several times. One practitioner stated that at their clinic they have a saying the "Every day is a learning day!" So on slow days they try to look for

ways to become more efficient and basically ways to get better. Everyone's opinion is valued! The overarching message for this category was find something that you are interested in learning more about and learn it! Is it massage, therapeutic exercise, or aromatherapy? One vet tech recommending finding / doing additional training that added even greater value to the practice! Another suggested researching chat groups, magazines, conference notes, and e-mails. I would suggest having a list of vet and physiotherapy journals or blogs that you search through periodically looking for articles & topics of interest.

Other

This category was broad, but really the sky is the limit! Some ideas suggested were cart fittings or measurements for orthotics, nutritional assessment, advice or counseling, weight loss planning, fitness training, nutraceutical advisements, providing a mobile service, and perhaps attending discharge sessions for post-operative patients (from the hospital-side of the clinic, if applicable). This category blends nicely with the 'learn more' category whereby learning or developing these skills could provide you and your clinic with a new offering that you (or someone at your clinic) could head!

Hopefully these ideas are inspiring enough that you will be looking forward to the next slow day so that you can jump on board one or more of these categories to really get your clinic hopping busy! It's a catch 22! So enjoy your next slow day!