

PERSONAL WELLNESS

How to Support Professional Development Among Your Team



Kate Boatright, VMD

NVA Butler Veterinary Associates and Emergency Center, Butler, Pa.

Professional development is an essential part of the successful veterinary practice. While credentialed technicians and veterinarians are required to maintain a certain number of training hours annually to keep their license, all team members can benefit from professional development. In a 2016 survey on practice culture, the American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA) found that supporting career development for all employees was rated as one of the top attributes of a positive workplace culture.¹ Positive workplace environments can help to improve employee retention, client satisfaction, and overall profitability. There are many ways that veterinary practices can support the professional development of all employees, whether they are credentialed or not.

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CONTINUING EDUCATION

Clinics should support continuing education (CE) training for veterinarians and certified technicians to help them maintain their license. This can be done through providing an annual stipend and time off for CE courses. While these benefits are common for associate veterinarians, not all certified technicians receive the same treatment. In a 2016 NAVTA demographic survey, 70% of technician respondents reported receiving a CE stipend, but only 50% received time off to pursue their CE training as part of their benefits package.² Providing a stipend and time off for certified technicians to pursue CE sends a message to these employees that their certification and work are valuable to the clinic.

Some clinics also require noncertified employees to obtain a certain number of CE hours annually. Clinics who have this requirement should provide opportunities for CE and consider providing a small stipend for these employees as well. While a small stipend may not allow for travel to a large conference annually, consider allowing employees to bank their funds over several years if they are interested in traveling to a national conference. Veterinarians and certified technicians can encourage their noncertified team members to join them at conferences, which can provide opportunities for bonding and team



development outside of the clinic in addition to professional training.

There are many ways to earn CE credit. Many are open to all employees, not just those with active licenses. CE credit can be earned through:

- Online training courses, though some states have limitations to the number of hours that can be earned in this way
- Local evening meetings or day-long seminars sponsored by specialty hospitals, industry representatives, or local veterinary medical associations (VMAs)
- State and national conferences.

As a return on investment for CE stipends, clinics could consider requiring team members to share information from lectures with the rest of the staff. This ensures that all members of the team stay aware of current advances in medicine and business, not just those who are taking classes or traveling to conferences regularly. If a team member is uncomfortable speaking in front of a group, they could make a handout summarizing key takeaways to distribute to their coworkers.

IN-CLINIC TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

Professional development goes beyond CE credits and attending lectures. Most clinics have set training or onboarding programs for new employees, but training should not stop here. Feedback is known to be an essential part of a successful training program and can be used as an opportunity to encourage professional development. Ask employees what skills they would like to develop and what areas they have an interest in learning more about. Additionally, reward employees who regularly pursue professional development opportunities with opportunities for advancement within the clinic.

Staff meetings provide a great opportunity for group professional and team development. Ask employees what areas they would like to learn about, such as pain management, preventive care protocols, communication with clients, or common disease processes. There are many ways to provide education for the team during staff meetings, many of which are free or have very low costs:

- If an employee has a specific interest in an area, invite them to research the topic and present to the rest of the team. This will allow the employee to pursue an

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interest of theirs and enhance their own learning through teaching the material to other staff members.

- Invite your veterinarians to present on specific topics of importance, such as emerging diseases, common presentations of disease, or new preventive care protocols. These presentations can help train staff members on how to best educate clients and ensure that consistent recommendations are coming from all levels of staff.
- Industry representatives can help provide training on new products and will sometimes have traveling speakers who can accompany them to your clinic and provide RACE-approved (Registry of Approved Continuing Education) CE in-house.
- Hands-on training in areas such as handling and restraint, blood draws, radiograph positioning, and other technical skills can be a helpful refresher for experienced and new employees alike. Plan a training session during a staff meeting and ask employees to volunteer their own cooperative pets for practice.
- Simulating emergency situations will help to ensure that the team is well-prepared for a true emergency and administration of CPR. All members of the team, from front desk and kennel staff to technicians and veterinarians, should participate in this training and know their roles.
- Communication training should be implemented for all staff members as well. This benefits all areas of the clinic and helps to improve client service and team dynamics.

ADVANCED TRAINING AND CERTIFICATIONS

There are numerous advanced training programs in the veterinary profession, including veterinary technician specialties or species-specific board certification for veterinarians through the American Board of Veterinary Practitioners. Practice managers can also pursue a certification in veterinary practice management. Beyond these specializations for veterinarians and

technicians, there are many certifications and advanced training courses that veterinarians and technicians may pursue to gain skills in specific areas, such as acupuncture, physical therapy, ultrasound, orthopedic surgery, dentistry, low-stress handling and more.

If your staff members are interested in these opportunities, encourage them and ask what the clinic can do to support their training. Ultimately, having employees with advanced credentials and certifications will help set your clinic apart from others in the area and allow you to offer unique services. Additionally, supporting employees in their professional advancement will help improve employee satisfaction and retention.

CONCLUSION

By committing to professional development for all team members, veterinary clinics can improve employee engagement, perceptions of practice culture, and the level of service offered to clients. There are many ways to achieve professional development both within and outside of the clinic, and clinics should be creative in determining ways to offer their employees these opportunities. **TVP**

References

1. Fukami C, Hutton B, Hoffman D, et al. Understanding the impact of organizational culture in veterinary practice [white paper]. aaha.org/public_documents/professional/resources/aaha_2016_du_culture_white_paper_final.pdf. Accessed on May 23, 2019.
2. NAVTA 2016 Demographic Survey Results. navta.net/page/Demographic_Survey?. Accessed on April 12, 2019.

Kate Boatright

Dr. Boatright is a 2013 graduate of the University of Pennsylvania. She currently works as a small animal general practitioner and emergency clinician in western Pennsylvania at NVA Butler Veterinary Associates and Emergency Center. Her clinical interests include feline medicine, surgery, internal medicine, and emergency. As a freelance writer and speaker, Dr. Boatright enjoys educating veterinary students and colleagues about communication, team building, and the unique challenges facing recent graduates. Outside of the clinic, she is active in her state and local VMAs and serves on the VBMA Alumni Committee. In her spare time, she enjoys running and spending time with her husband, son, and three cats.



Heartgard® Plus

(ivermectin/pyrantel)

CHEWABLES

CAUTION: Federal (U.S.A.) law restricts this drug to use by or on the order of a licensed veterinarian.

INDICATIONS: For use in dogs to prevent canine heartworm disease by eliminating the tissue stage of heartworm larvae (*Dirofilaria immitis*) for a month (30 days) after infection and for the treatment and control of ascarids (*Toxocara canis*, *Toxascaris leonina*) and hookworms (*Ancylostoma caninum*, *Uncinaria stenocephala*, *Ancylostoma braziliense*).

DOSAGE: HEARTGARD® Plus (ivermectin/pyrantel) should be administered orally at monthly intervals at the recommended minimum dose level of 6 mcg of ivermectin per kilogram (2.72 mcg/lb) and 5 mg of pyrantel (as pamoate salt) per kg (2.27 mg/lb) of body weight. The recommended dosing schedule for prevention of canine heartworm disease and for the treatment and control of ascarids and hookworms is as follows:

Dog Weight	CheWables Per Month	Ivermectin Content	Pyrantel Content	Color Coding On Foil Backing and Carton
Up to 25 lb	1	68 mcg	57 mg	Blue
26 to 50 lb	1	136 mcg	114 mg	Green
51 to 100 lb	1	272 mcg	227 mg	Brown

HEARTGARD Plus is recommended for dogs 6 weeks of age and older.

For dogs over 100 lb use the appropriate combination of these chewables.

ADMINISTRATION: Remove only one chewable at a time from the foil-backed blister card. Return the card with the remaining chewables to its box to protect the product from light. Because most dogs find HEARTGARD Plus palatable, the product can be offered to the dog by hand. Alternatively, it may be added intact to a small amount of dog food. The chewable should be administered in a manner that encourages the dog to chew, rather than to swallow without chewing. Chewables may be broken into pieces and fed to dogs that normally swallow treats whole.

Care should be taken that the dog consumes the complete dose, and treated animals should be observed for a few minutes after administration to ensure that part of the dose is not lost or rejected. If it is suspected that any of the dose has been lost, redosing is recommended.

HEARTGARD Plus should be given at monthly intervals during the period of the year when mosquitoes (vectors), potentially carrying infective heartworm larvae, are active. The initial dose must be given within a month (30 days) after the dog's first exposure to mosquitoes. The final dose must be given within a month (30 days) after the dog's last exposure to mosquitoes.

When replacing another heartworm preventive product in a heartworm disease preventive program, the first dose of HEARTGARD Plus must be given within a month (30 days) of the last dose of the former medication.

If the interval between doses exceeds a month (30 days), the efficacy of ivermectin can be reduced. Therefore, for optimal performance, the chewable must be given once a month on or about the same day of the month. If treatment is delayed, whether by a few days or many, immediate treatment with HEARTGARD Plus and resumption of the recommended dosing regimen will minimize the opportunity for the development of adult heartworms.

Monthly treatment with HEARTGARD Plus also provides effective treatment and control of ascarids (*T. canis*, *T. leonina*) and hookworms (*A. caninum*, *U. stenocephala*, *A. braziliense*). Clients should be advised of measures to be taken to prevent reinfection with intestinal parasites.

EFFICACY: HEARTGARD Plus Chewables, given orally using the recommended dose and regimen, are effective against the tissue larval stage of *D. immitis* for a month (30 days) after infection and, as a result, prevent the development of the adult stage. HEARTGARD Plus Chewables are also effective against canine ascarids (*T. canis*, *T. leonina*) and hookworms (*A. caninum*, *U. stenocephala*, *A. braziliense*).

ACCEPTABILITY: In acceptability and field trials, HEARTGARD Plus was shown to be an acceptable oral dosage form that was consumed at first offering by the majority of dogs.

PRECAUTIONS: All dogs should be tested for existing heartworm infection before starting treatment with HEARTGARD Plus which is not effective against adult *D. immitis*. Infected dogs must be treated to remove adult heartworms and microfilariae before initiating a program with HEARTGARD Plus.

While some microfilariae may be killed by the ivermectin in HEARTGARD Plus at the recommended dose level, HEARTGARD Plus is not effective for microfilariae clearance. A mild hypersensitivity-type reaction, presumably due to dead or dying microfilariae and particularly involving a transient diarrhea, has been observed in clinical trials with ivermectin alone after treatment of some dogs that have circulating microfilariae.

Keep this and all drugs out of the reach of children.

In case of ingestion by humans, clients should be advised to contact a physician immediately. Physicians may contact a Poison Control Center for advice concerning cases of ingestion by humans.

Store between 68°F - 77°F (20°C - 25°C). Excursions between 59°F - 86°F (15°C - 30°C) are permitted. Protect product from light.

ADVERSE REACTIONS: In clinical field trials with HEARTGARD Plus, vomiting or diarrhea within 24 hours of dosing was rarely observed (1.1% of administered doses). The following adverse reactions have been reported following the use of HEARTGARD: Depression/lethargy, vomiting, anorexia, diarrhea, mydriasis, ataxia, staggering, convulsions and hypersalivation.

SAFETY: HEARTGARD Plus has been shown to be bioequivalent to HEARTGARD, with respect to the bioavailability of ivermectin. The dose regimens of HEARTGARD Plus and HEARTGARD are the same with regard to ivermectin (6 mcg/kg). Studies with ivermectin indicate that certain dogs of the Collie breed are more sensitive to the effects of ivermectin administered at elevated dose levels (more than 16 times the target use level) than dogs of other breeds. At elevated doses, sensitive dogs showed adverse reactions which included mydriasis, depression, ataxia, tremors, drooling, paresis, recumbency, excitability, stupor, coma and death. HEARTGARD demonstrated no signs of toxicity at 10 times the recommended dose (60 mcg/kg) in sensitive Collies. Results of these trials and bioequivalency studies, support the safety of HEARTGARD products in dogs, including Collies, when used as recommended.

HEARTGARD Plus has shown a wide margin of safety at the recommended dose level in dogs, including pregnant or breeding bitches, stud dogs and puppies aged 6 or more weeks. In clinical trials, many commonly used flea collars, dips, shampoos, anthelmintics, antibiotics, vaccines and steroid preparations have been administered with HEARTGARD Plus in a heartworm disease prevention program.

In one trial, where some pups had parvovirus, there was a marginal reduction in efficacy against intestinal nematodes, possibly due to a change in intestinal transit time.

HOW SUPPLIED: HEARTGARD Plus is available in three dosage strengths (See DOSAGE section) for dogs of different weights. Each strength comes in convenient cartons of 6 and 12 chewables.

For customer service, please contact Merial at 1-888-637-4251.