DEVELOPING OUR PRACTICE TEAM: 
HOW TO IMPROVE OUR 24/7 HOSPITAL LEVEL OF CARE AND EFFICIENCY THROUGH THE 
INTRODUCTION OF VETERINARY NURSES AND BETTER STAFF TRAINING.

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SUMMARY

This report aims to demonstrate that good training and clear understanding of goals for all team members increases motivation and performance.

We have paid particular attention to our support team and have introduced two nurses.

The practice was experiencing several issue:
Complaints from senior vet members that felt were asked to perform tasks that slowed work or seemed inappropriate for their role.
Reception staff felt not sufficiently knowledgeable to address medical issues with clients.
Clients felt the loss of an experienced adm/receptionist when she recently left.
Partners felt overwhelmed and in need of reliable and motivated support team members.

Management decided to take appropriate action by introducing nurses to the team.
The purpose was to address the above issues with trained and motivated nurses.
We have understood that the commitment of the management team is paramount in creating a well organised training program and allowing time for staff training and development.

For this purpose Brian Faulkner’s and Helen Frewin’s modules were particularly useful and their theories were applied in our working environment with clear evidence of success both in all staff wellbeing and profitability.

Ms Frewin in Module 4 (Keeping the right staff) stressed the importance of employing the right people and then keeping them by applying a system where new recruits were immersed in the system and followed in a continuous educational process.
This process is based on the belief that to get the best from our team they must be engaged, motivated, and well managed.
Managers need to appreciate that specific knowledge is required to achieve the best results.
A system where new recruits get to know the manager and his/her ideas, the business, the way things are done, adm, rules and Regulations, gives the best induction for a productive fitting-in.
The following stages of induction were training and appraisal and were key to maintaining good and productive relationships with staff and key team members.
Ms Frewin’s model of Setting Goals, Coaching Individuals as they Work and Giving Them Feedback on Performance was applied to our new employees.
Mr Faulker in module 2 (...) provided us with the highly successful “colourful approach” method to train both veterinarians and support staff.
This model proved to be inspirational and allowed us to explain in a simple and very effective way what was expected of our team and the exact outcome desired.
At the end of our study we felt we had achieved our goal in creating a system both effective and appreciated by all members of staff and clients.
Total turnover of retail increasde by 20% in 11 months.

INTRODUCTION

In Italy there are 20,000 vets, 7000 surgeries and approximatley 25 milions pets. The majority of veterinary practices are small 1.5 vet organisations (this is the norm in centre-southern Italy). Only 20% are clinics with 3.5 vets (mainly northern Italy) and 7% are large organisations usually 24/7 hospitals with 5+ vets. Clinics and Hospitals employ administration and nursing staff whilst generally small surgeries do not. Almost all have no clear or established method of training and no specific knowledge to ensure full benefit of the use of both veterinarians and support staff. The Italian Society of Veterinary Management has in recent years started a CPD scheme that aims to improve and teach management systems and processes. (Through courses and an annual Management Forum).

The law is clear about the employment of adm staff in veterinary business but until recently there was no specific contract for veterinary nurses. In recent years two Veterinary Nurse Schools have opened and are now recognised by the European Nursing Association.

Employment laws are such that staff are extremely expensive and their employment seriously effects costs and therefore profit.

Our 24/7 clinic presently employs 4 administrators and two nurses.

Adm staff are rappresented by 4 people that mainly cover the reception, customer care, retail and accounting duties.

We seriously lacked paramedic staff or rather, qualified people that could help veterinarians work in a more efficent and productive way.

Our perception was that we were not doing well in customer care and retail and generally lacked continuity between the vets clinical work and the more practical aspects of a veterinary business.

Reception duties, such as sales of food, drugs, settling bills and further business opportunities were critical areas to improve (Brain Faulkner's "Bermuda Triangle").

Issues raised by staff:
- Complaints from senior vet members that felt were being asked to perform tasks that slowed work or seemed inappropriate for their role.
- Reception staff did not feel sufficiently knowledgeable to address medical issues with clients.
- Clients missed a much loved experienced senior receptionist who had recently left.
- Partners felt overwhelmed and in need of a reliable and motivated support team.

Traditionally in our country Vets will cover clinic, adm duties, reception and retail activities. This results in poor time management and loss of profitability.
Our reception staff were unable to help the vets and cover reception duties: customer care (promoting preventative health medicine, following up cases, checking social media, answering and understanding clients requests etc). For that reason we recently employed two nurses (both qualified but from different schools). We used knowledge acquired in the Improve Course and other studies to create a model suitable for our hospital to train and keep long-term skilled people, improve quality of staff and reach the four expected outcomes: Cases Solved, Client Satisfaction, Financial resolution and Staff Harmony.

During a period of 11 months we have used this system with consistent positive results both with our vets and nursing team.

PROJECT

Two qualified Nurses applied for a job in our 24/7 hospital. Both of them had little work experience and no specific training in customer care and retail. Our aim was to get the most out of our team so they could work at their best, engaged and fully contributing (Helen Trewin 2015).

Module 3 by Helen Frewin (Keeping the right staff) was implemented and adapted to our situation and organised as follows:

- An induction period where new members got to know their manager, the business ("Global orientation" Walt Disney), the team and systems (how we do things here and what is expected from the individual) administration, Health and Safety.
- Working hours were reduced and emphasis was on getting to know people, giving them time to adjust and understanding their attitude and concerns.
- Following induction, both nurses underwent our performance program where they were given a set of goals to work towards (to understand our software, social network, phone system, how to greet people, explain handouts etc).
Coaching was provided with individual and group sessions and frequent feedback was given with new sets of goals to work towards (puppy classes, weight control, triage etc).

Setting goals is no easy task and we felt we needed the best possible model to explain to our staff what our Hospital is about and what our expectations are. Brian Faulker in Module 6 and 2 gave us exactly what we needed. The “colourful approach” and the “Proactive pursuits of 4 Outcomes” is the perfect “Smart” model which people understand immediately.

Our two new nurses were given the opportunity and the time to fully understand what this model meant.

Using the ‘Proactive pursuits of 4 outcomes’ made the goals given to the nurses: helping to solve cases, keeping clients happy, making sure Client’s bills were paid and doing so in harmony with the rest of the team, perfectly understandable and logical. This model adapted from the original one (Brian Faulkner Improve Swindon 2015) delivered the message in a very effective way.
Coaching to pursue the objectives was given and topics such as effective communication with emphasis on active listening, assertive recommendation and the introduction of a system to follow (The client phase, The patient phase, The recommendation phase, The doing and the business End) as a S.O.P (standard operation procedure) were implemented. Feedback provided us with useful information and determined the pace and effectiveness of the process. This S.O.P. has been implemented now for 11 months and is used for all team members.

RESULTS

Overall results were considered very good. The aim was to achieve an effective team of nurses to improve services and address all the issues raised. Nurses after appraisals were found to be focused and had clear understanding of what was expected from them. Asking them to describe what was expected resulted in satisfactory answers.

Other team members were generally supportive and their reduced workload improved morale and performance (Individual turnover increased).

Partners and vets have gained two useful team members who make it possible for them to delegate certain tasks (triage, injections, blood collection, nail clipping, social network etc.) and have more time to spend in the important and non urgent quadrant of time management (Einshawer Time management Matrix).
Clients seem enthusiastic about the new addition to our staff and have welcomed our 2 nurses and understand their role. In Italy veterinary nurses are still a rarity but clients quickly appreciate their services within our clinic. Questionnaires were provided and the results were consistent with positive answers. The Reception team was equally happy and gladly shared the workload with competent clinical staff who are also available for admin chores. Total retail turnover increased by 20%.

DISCUSSION

Our 24/7 Small Animal Hospital shares the vision and goal that “Excellency in veterinary care can only be provided in a economically healthy clinic that allows continuous investment in human resources and equipment enabling ongoing improvement in quality “. (Essentials of Veterinary Practice. Moreau and Nap, Published by Henston 2010). Due to changes in the Employment Laws, we were able to employ two veterinary nurses. Our internal analysis suggested that we did not have a successful induction and training system and lacked a simple and effective process to inspire and engage team members. The Improve Course provided us with the motivation and the systems we were looking for to make positive change.

The aim of this essay is to show that the use of proper tools such as those suggested by Helen Frewin (Keeping the Right Staff, module 3) and Brian Faulker (“The proactive pursuits of the four Outcomes” Module 1 and module 2 Improve Swindon 2015), were highly successful for our Company and are now established standard operation procedures.

CONCLUSION AND REFLECTION

Team engagement and generally speaking getting, keeping and building a positive and productive relationship with staff must be one of the most difficult tasks a veterinary entrepreneur has to face on a daily basis. Our 24/7 Small Animal Hospital needed more specialised support staff. Finding Models or MTSOP to reach goals (train and use nurses) and apply strategies (improve our services to customers) was our challenge. The Improve course introduced us to Helen Frewin’s and Brian Faulkenr’s models that provided us with a straightforward method to improve team performance. Learning to train and educate our people resulted in more trust and better performance. Training ourselves was perhaps the most difficult challenge and resulted in sometimes prolonged discussions. A very “fixed mind” attitude emerged from both myself and my business partner. Steps are being taken to build a more “growth mind” attitude. Changes in the Employment Law in Italy has allowed us to employ nurses.
This role was needed as vets were performing tasks that in other countries and in human medicine are delegated to specifically trained personnel. The introduction of two nurses has greatly improved staff morale and overall efficiency. Clients are enthusiastic with our effort to improve services and customer care. Finally our two nurses seem to enjoy all the attention and hopefully a productive relationship has started. These outcomes, based on the research for effective MTSOPS are viewed as the beginning of positive changes for both our clinic and the Italian association of veterinary management (SIMV), the Italian Association of Veterinary Surgeons (A.N.M.V.I) and the Italian Association of Veterinary Nurses.

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