

Communication Hacks for Veterinary Medicine

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Introduction

Many veterinary professionals propagate an unfortunate and common cultural theme: “life comes last”. In our modern and hyperconnected veterinary world, successful management of this culture often stems from one constant: how well you communicate with other humans. Simple tweaks in how referral practices communicate both within their teams and towards clients and referring practices can affect everything from quality of medicine, to efficiency, to clinician burnout.

In this lecture we’ll cover a host of tools available (many free), and how to best leverage them so that you can hack the art of veterinary communication.

Email as your Life Productivity Hub

Email, if used properly, should become your grand central station of communication. Text messaging, Facebook messenger, WhatsApp, Twitter, LinkedIn and the likes can all be fun ways to communicate, but only email can be flagged, forwarded, organized, delegated, and double as a to-do list.

Making email most effective will take some investment in time up front. First, if you are still using MS Outlook on one computer, you have unnecessarily complicated your modern multi-device life. Gmail and Calendar (as a part of GSuite for businesses) are instant communication accelerators. I recommend setting up your own patient Gmail inbox (free), such as dr.you@gmail.com. It is fast, available on all devices in sync, can be viewed within Outlook, and has powerful add-ons and integrations that you can only find here: gsuite.google.com

Next, read up on Inbox Zero, which is a system for managing a busy inbox with ease where all emails are touched once (either flagged for answering later, responded to, or deleted). After that they are “archived” using Gmail’s unique system of deleting a message without ever deleting it.

Finally, to take email efficiency to the next level, I recommend batching. Turn off all stress-inducing email notifications on your devices and train yourself to check emails regularly but only at certain times chosen by you.

Mixmax

Mixmax, only available if you use Gmail, is one of my most powerful communication hacks. Mixmax is installed as a Gmail add-on and provides the ability to create email templates, snooze emails, set reminders if someone doesn’t reply, and send emails later. It also adds the ability to know who/when/where your sent emails are opened and provides helpful polling and group calendar scheduling. www.mixmax.com

Google Voice to Take Back Your Voicemail

Google Voice is probably the least-known Google service, but one of the best. This free service transcribes voicemails and allows you to receive your voicemail and text messages in your email. I set Google Voice to handle all of my voicemail boxes (cell, office, home). Now they all come to one central place: my email, transcribed and with an audio file, for easy sorting and delegating.

You can also get a free Google Voice phone number and use it as your second cell number. Give it to select clients (or anyone) who may need to reach you, while keeping your primary cell phone number private. The

Google Voice dashboard allows you to set which phone this rings (if any), at which time, and set specific voicemail greetings based on who is calling you. www.google.com/voice

In-Clinic Workflow Tools

In-clinic workflow communication tools offer some of the biggest operational opportunities for communication improvements. Check out the use of rudimentary Google tools (docs, sheets, forms) and a new product called **Instinct** (www.instinct.vet) which allows state-of-the-art centers to digitize inpatient and outpatient treatment workflows in order to improve charge capture, team communication, and patient care (*full disclosure: I'm part of the team that created this*).

Record Sharing Portals

Medical record sharing is an integral part of veterinary practice in our increasingly hyperspecializing industry. Tools like online fax machines and integrated practice management email and fax services can help you break your inefficient fax machine habit. Taking this a step further is rVetLink (www.rvetlink.com), a service that provides automated two-way communication tools (through a web and app portal) for primary care veterinarians and veterinary referral centers. Note: electronic medical record adoption is necessary to make this a reality.

Client Communication Tips

A host of client communication-enhancing services are popping up. Services worth checking out include Zipwhip (www.zipwhip.com) which turns your clinic's landline phone into a web and mobile portal that allows you to text back and forth with clients. Finally, if you are thinking of dabbling in telehealth opportunities for your clinic, consider Zoom (www.zoom.us) for conference calls, video chat, and screen sharing -- it's the only software I've found that works simply and reliably on all devices.

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