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FUTURE TRENDS IN VETERINARY DESIGN

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DEMOGRAPHIC AND SOCIETAL TRENDS

Societal attitudes toward companion animals have been rapidly changing. As animals’ benefits to people become more widely known, the value of animals has increased in our society. The continuing transition from owning a disposable pet to being the guardian of a companion animal has prompted the demand for a wide range of services along with high standards of veterinary care. Your clients are looking for convenient ways of caring for and building more satisfying relationships with their animal companions.

Giving your clients what they need, or believe they need, is a critical part of developing a facility that will respond to their requirements. Some of the facility types that respond to specific niches are:

• Practices that focus on whole-life care, including adoption, fertility, puppy wellness, behavior training, day care, nutrition, rehabilitation, geriatrics, euthanasia, and grief counseling.
• “Doc-in-the-box” storefront practices that thrive on low start-up and operational costs.
• Daycare facilities that provide training and behavior modification services.
• Centralized specialty, referral, and emergency practices that combine the resources, skills, and leading-edge technologies that were formerly only available in the academic setting.
• Premium, full-service pet resorts and spas with high-touch, human interaction.

STRATEGIC DESIGN SOLUTIONS

The exam pod concept is utilized in various forms in human medicine. It groups three or four exam rooms in a configuration that closely matches the way a doctor and a tech team can work a series of exam rooms simultaneously and in conjunction with high density scheduling. The pod concept is particularly effective in outpatient facilities where most animals are not received and held.

A multi-task exam room is created by breaking out the back wall of an exam room by using a folding glass wall. The resulting room can function as an exam room during the morning and evening rush hours and, with the wall folded back, as an additional treatment workstation at other times of the day.

A ready room is essentially a mini-treatment room adjacent to the exam rooms. This space works particularly well with the pod concept and high density scheduling.

A technician can do minor procedures in the ready room, which allows the doctor to go on to the next exam room.

Interactive education includes client service centers, information ports, and interactive education areas. This infotainment can be as simple as an interactive computer or can be expanded to the point where the entire hospital is built around a central theme.

A resource room is a multi-purpose space that can be accessible to the waiting area, the treatment area, and doctors’ offices. It can have a large table, similar to a conference room, and shelves and desks around the perimeter. It can be used as a library, an additional workspace, or combined with the treatment area to allow greater capacity.

Practices that combine emergency services with typical veterinary services can eliminate confusion and conflict in the waiting area by providing a separate emergency entrance.

With express check-in, arriving clients would be met at the curb and quickly and efficiently helped with their pet. Express check-out would be done in a private setting, such as an exam room, rather than a corner of the reception desk. Both check-in and check-out could be supported by a nearby holding ward.

Pet spas and resorts are new and exciting facility types. They stress the luxury amenities that can be provided to pets. Features include aerobic and exercise classes, massage, hydrotherapy, gourmet pet food restaurants and treats, apartment-like animal housing, beauty-salon grooming, and extensive outdoor landscape features.

Diagnostic technology is increasing. In addition to the present-day x-ray unit, you will see the increased use of small-scale MRI’s, called E-MRI’s, high-resolution ultrasound, and CT scans. Lab diagnostic capabilities will continue to increase. The equipment will become more compact and easier to calibrate, which will enable hospitals to increase in-house diagnostic capabilities without increasing the required space devoted to the lab. Hospitals should be designed with plenty of flexibility in anticipation future technological changes.

Computer network systems can allow for the entry of medical data, lab reports, digitally transmitted diagnostic imaging, inventory control and reorder, communication with referring specialists, owner call backs, and conferencing with other doctors through the use of data information ports or network-linked computer terminals. The transition toward a larger network will cause individual practices to establish information ports to plug into the network. This may be as simple as a linked computer terminal, or may be as exotic as a live feed from a surgical theater that is piped to an interactive, big-screen teleconferencing center.

A greeter’s desk is a small, freestanding desk with one small computer terminal that can be used instead of an imposing reception desk. A nearby workroom with immediate accessibility to the exam rooms and the waiting area can house additional computer terminals, files, phones, paperwork, printouts, paper storage, and office equipment. This allows a greeter to center attention on the client and patient without the distraction of the phones and other duties.

SUMMARY

Anticipating and responding to the diverse influences of trends is a challenge to the veterinary industry, as well as the designers of veterinary facilities. With the increasing rate at which hospitals become obsolete, designing to change the focus of today’s state-of-the-art facilities will help extend the practical life of newly constructed veterinary hospitals.