

## Scheduling for Profit

Since I began utilizing the After Hours Assurance program, my practice has enjoyed a great deal of growth as measured by both financial and client volume analysis. I have found that objectively measuring our month to month growth allows me to see the value in the programs we implement in our clinic. Whether it's new drug availability, or special pricing on parasite control products, it's vital that I know how much financial return we are generating from our financial and time investment in that given program. In other words...Am I benefitting both financially, and in terms of the time it takes my staff to implement this?

With this article I will share what I've learned about scheduling as it pertains to the After Hours Assurance program, so that other practices can benefit. I have found that it is important for veterinary offices to manage their scheduling to help maximize the profitability of the After Hours Assurance program offered by On Call Solutions.

Our own clinic suffered financially in the past because of inefficient scheduling. Our office staff was trained to fill consecutive slots for client office visits so that the work day could be concluded as early as possible once all office visits were completed. When I bought the practice, I realized how many impromptu office visits we were turning away because there was no availability in our day to day schedule. Those people who may have been potential clients were told we were filled, and that their need to see a doctor that day would have to be met somewhere else. If you also use this scheduling policy, you might as well be delivering money by truck to your competitors. Scariest yet, you may not even know that this is how your office staff is handling the schedule.

Once we began utilizing After Hours Assurance, we realized the principle benefit is the opportunity to capture significant incremental revenue by treating cases in house when our on call veterinarian concluded that an immediate trip to the ER was not warranted. The scheduling problem became obvious. We couldn't see

“emergencies” within our workday without altering our scheduling policy to ensure appointment slots were left open throughout the day.

I retrained our office personnel to schedule each doctor with three, fifteen minute appointments in a row, with the next fifteen minute slot left open. This leaves us with several open slots to schedule new appointments as the day progresses. When the slots are not filled with appointments, our doctors are grateful to have the extra time to make calls to clients, communicate with specialty hospitals about referred cases, document their findings and treatments, and lend a hand in consult to a fellow doctor.

I also redesigned our appointment calendar so that it could be easily accessed by all of the staff, and posted the daily schedule in various points around the work stations. By making the schedule highly visible our doctors and staff were able to predict what their day would entail, and effectively manage their own responsibilities. The built in benefit is that we rarely leave patients sitting in the waiting room past their scheduled visit time. Less hassle for clients also converts to money because they are more willing to schedule and show up for regular wellness exams.

While it may seem that we would see fewer patients in a day, and therefore make less money, nothing could be further from the truth. Emergency related calls from our clients taken after hours through After Hours Assurance are often cases which can safely be handled on the next business day. Data collected from On Call Solutions supports this in proving 65% of these paid after hours calls result in the veterinarian recommending medical treatment wait until the next business day.

When we responsibly advise our clients to wait and see us the next business day, we capture the revenue that would have gone to another hospital. We are able to effectively treat our own patient with whom we have an existing relationship, and generate revenue from the case including all lab work, x-rays, ultrasounds, or other diagnostics. We also receive the money generated by treatment. And of course our clients are happier to be treated by a doctor they know and trust. Not to mention the gratitude our clients express when they avoid an unnecessary and expensive trip to an emergency clinic.

While leaving scheduling gaps would hurt some veterinarians' bottom line, the doctor who uses After Hours Assurance sees its financial rewards. I hope that my own experience helps practices make positive changes that improve their customer service and revenue generation. Whether or not you use After Hours Assurance, it's time to analyze your scheduling practices to make your business more profitable.

Bradley W. Carmichael DVM