

# Increasing Your Practice's Output and Better Serving your Clients Utilizing a Veterinarian/Technician Team Approach

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## Abstract

It is a common desire of many veterinarians practicing in animal agriculture to be able to add to the bottom line of the livestock operation that they work for by consulting with the producer in ways to improve management of their operation, commonly called production medicine. Yet many practitioners who have stated a desire to provide additional production medicine services to clients are not successful in implementing these services, partly due to a lack of time. One avenue to create the time necessary to provide extra services is the utilization of the veterinarian/technician team approach. Along with improving the beef quality of producer's career-change dairy cattle, this approach has increased the efficiency of the veterinary services provided, which saves the livestock operation money. Ultimately it allows for more services to be provided by the veterinarian/technician team, such as developing standard operating procedures and treatment protocols, implementing and monitoring programs, conducting field trials, and a myriad of other services. The ability to increase a practice's output and better serve clients increases the veterinarian and technician job satisfaction and increases the client's satisfaction with the practice and the total return to their operation.

## Introduction

It is a common desire of many food animal practitioners to add to the bottom line of the producers they work with by improving management of their operation, commonly called production medicine. The American Association of Bovine Practitioners (AABP), local, regional, state and national organizations, and some pharmaceutical companies, supply tools and resources for

practitioners to provide these services. Yet many practitioners who have stated a desire to provide additional production medicine services to clients are not successful in implementing these services. A common complaint is a lack of time to effectively provide these extra services. Day<sup>1</sup> provided a summary of ways to allow more time to provide these services. One avenue described is the utilization of the veterinarian/technician team approach.

This approach has been used successfully by several bovine practitioners. In our case it began as a desire to improve the quality of beef from dairy cattle by moving our injections from the higher priced cuts of the rear quarter to the neck. Between 66% and 100% of the top round and top butt go into higher priced cuts of beef utilized by Arby's Roast Beef<sup>®</sup>, Sizzler<sup>®</sup>, and airlines, resulting in an economic benefit in the form of higher cull prices because of a high demand for these products. However, because this is a collective benefit for all dairy producers, convincing an individual dairy producer to improve the quality of his career-change dairy cows for the overall good of the industry, but without immediate personal economic return, is a very difficult task. On the other hand, when a producer can do this and save money, then it becomes an easier pill to swallow. This is what has been accomplished by utilizing a technician during our routine fertility checks. Our technician can increase the efficiency of the service provided by saving 15-20 minutes per hour of a veterinary check. As a result, what previously was a three-hour veterinary check has been reduced to two hours.

## The System In Action

When we arrive at the dairy, Ms. Kral does the preparatory work (mixing vaccines and loading syringes)

while Dr. Day begins palpating. Using a two-color chalk coding system, Dr. Day marks cattle which needs to be injected, and which vaccine or hormone is to be administered. Ms. Kral does not have to be with Dr. Day while he examines the cows. Therefore, along with doing the preparation work and injections, she is able to collect feed samples to run through the particle separator and body condition score dry cows, close-up cows and early fresh cows. She checks urine pH of close-up cows on an anionic program and also collects the data for the Break Through Management programs we monitor. She marks heads for us when the head marker is behind (or if there is no designated head marker) and records palpation findings on the veterinary checklist when the owner or herdsman is distracted with management duties or phone calls. If she is working with us (not doing one of the many of things already enumerated), she will indicate how many cows to skip to move us along faster. This works especially well with the client who has a hard time finding the next marked cow, recording results from the last cow, and carrying on a conversation all at once.

The increased efficiency goes far beyond the veterinary exam. Ms. Kral's services allow Dr. Day the freedom to pursue additional avenues of production medicine that were previously impossible due to a lack of time. We are now providing more services and utilize time more efficiently for the producer. As an example, having Ms. Kral perform the body condition scoring and urine pH testing on the close-up cows is far less expensive than having Dr. Day performing these same tasks. This is a win for everyone. The service is high quality, but it is provided to the client at a lower rate. As a result, the veterinarian is able to spend more of his client-valued time discussing the findings and making recommendations.

In addition to more efficient and cost-effective use of time, utilizing a veterinarian/technician team seems to improve the reproductive performance. Before utilizing the team approach, conception rates on the day of the veterinary check were the lowest of the week. With a technician, conception rates on the day of the veterinary checks are similar to other days. Before using a veterinarian/technician team approach, cows were being released from the headlocks later because the veterinary check was not complete before the breeder accomplished his usual tasks. Now the breeder is releasing cows on the day of the veterinary check like all other days of the week as they are being completed more quickly. Therefore, cows are not locked up any longer on the day of the veterinary check than on any other day.

The veterinary/technician team approach has been instrumental in our ability to conduct field trials effectively and correctly. When serving as a test site for FDA approval field trials or other field studies for pharma-

ceutical companies, the paper work and attention to detail are critical and can be a challenge. Ms. Kral has been involved with data collection, trained observations, and training of the dairy personnel required for some of the trials, all reducing the burden on Dr. Day. Furthermore, we are able to conduct more "in-house" trials for individual dairies, looking at the economic return from various management schemes or different products.

When developing treatment protocols for a dairy and training personnel on proper implementation of these protocols, we have found it is best to start from scratch, rather than trying to use a template from another facility or another veterinarian. Ms. Kral can take notes during the development of the protocols and transform our rough notes into usable and readable protocols. Furthermore, it becomes important to monitor the effectiveness of the treatment protocols. Ms. Kral can help in this endeavor by collecting data associated with re-treats and cures.

When we convince a livestock operation to start a new program, we help that operation in the education of the personnel who will be implementing the program by teaching them about the science behind the program. Furthermore, we help them weave the new procedures into the daily or weekly routine, such as implementation of an "ov-sync" program. We help them decide what day is best for injections, and therefore the day of most inseminations. Will extra breeders be needed for the increased number of animals that will be in heat that day, where will these animals be and how will they be identified and found, who will be giving shots and how will they know which cows to inject, how will we know this program is working, etc.? Ms. Kral helps with implementation and monitoring of the results of these programs and has been able to help identify problems when the program has not reached the expected goals. Furthermore, we have had occasions when an operation was not able to give injections due to a temporary shortage of personnel. In these situations, we have been able to contract Ms. Kral's services to the operation to give the necessary injections until the employee void was filled.

Other duties Ms. Kral has done in our practice include routine collection of bulk tank samples for culture, bleeding cows for metabolic profiles, monitoring refrigerator temperatures, monitoring silage temperatures and pH's, monitoring drug inventories on livestock facilities, and helping with milking equipment checks. Her job description has been limited only by our imagination.

In our opinion, a technician should be a Certified Veterinary Technician (CVT). As a CVT, a technician has been trained in pharmacology, anatomy and physiology, sample collection, infectious diseases, microbiology, parasitology, etc. This reduces the need for extensive on the job training. It also reduces the need for detailed

explanations in many cases of why certain procedures are important and how to accomplish those tasks. The technician should also be someone who is comfortable around cattle and has cattle experience. For developing protocols, doing clinical trials, and when monitoring employees and BreakThrough Management programs, it is important that the technician have good computer skills. Obviously, personality and work ethic also play a big role in the suitability of an individual as a technician. It is an added benefit to find a person who can see what needs to be done, has initiative, and a good head on their shoulders.

We charge the dairy for technician time at about 20% of the veterinary charge, but it still returns the livestock operation at least a 2:1 return on their money when compared to paying a veterinarian to provide those services. Having a technician has created a profit center for our business, but has not reduced the personal income of the veterinarian. Instead, he now has more time and opportunity to provide other services and consultations.

### Conclusions

Another opportunity for veterinarians may exist. By providing services to a livestock operation in the role of a "Bovine Practitioner Technician", this service could provide temporary relief for under-employed operations (as described above), or provide routine services like those provided by semen companies, such as AI technicians. Table 1 lists possible roles for a technician with or without a veterinarian present, in the context of a traditional veterinary technician role, or in the role of contracted labor for the livestock operation. This list was the result of a brain storming session of several veterinarians and is certainly not all inclusive, nor are all the items listed necessarily appropriate for a technician to perform, but they are shown to provide food for thought.

### References

1. Day JD: Implementing expanded services or working outside the box. *Proc Am Assoc Bov Pract* 34:23-26, 2001.

**Table 1.** Possible Roles of Bovine Practitioner Technicians.

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Dry cow therapy		
Vaccinations		
BST injections		
Reproductive program injections for timed breeding programs		
Culturing	– bulk tanks	
	– individual cows	– fresh
		– clinical
		– whole herd-
Fresh cow temping programs		
BTM facilitation		
Record systems	– data entry	
	– action lists	
	– disease monitoring	
	– program compliance	
	– results summaries	
	– program measurement	
Feed samples	– sampling for lab analysis	
	– TMR samples for particle separator box	
	– Silage analysis	– temp
		– pH
		– dry matter
Blood samples		
Urine samples		
Drug inventory management and delivery		
Body condition scoring		
Urine pH of close up cows		
Calf dehorning		
Spraying feet for foot warts		
Flaming udders		
Docking tails		
Routine milking machine evaluation		
Hospital management	– record keeping	
	– nursing care	
	– monitoring response	

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