

Implementation of Production Medicine Programs

William P. Kearley, D.V.M.
P.O. Box 817
Wendell, Idaho 83355

The projection for food animal practice in the future is that we will provide more consultative services and less technical services. In order to meet this challenge, a new area of veterinary medicine called production medicine is being developed. My definition of production medicine is the combining of economic and management consultation with an integrated health management program to increase the efficiency of profitable production of milk, meat or replacement animals in a livestock operation. A key issue is whether we as veterinarians can mold the concepts of production medicine into a cohesive program to offer to our clients. I would like to discuss my ideas on how to implement a production medicine practice.

I feel there is a basic progression which needs to be followed in order to establish a new style of practice.

1. Define and write down goals for yourself and your clients. Both short term and long term goals.
2. Learn basic production medicine principles.
3. Develop a program to offer. Write it down, diagram it and fit it together.
4. Analyze yourself and your clients for personality type. Learn how to communicate with different types of people.
5. Decide how to charge for the program.
6. Learn some sales and marketing principles.
7. Set up the program. Make the final draft and begin to implement it.
8. Sell the program to your "1" client most likely to utilize the program.
9. Modify the program slowly as you and your client gain confidence in the program.
10. When comfortable with the program for "1" client, then sell the program to another prospective client. May have to go outside your existing clients if necessary.

In changing to a consultative practice I feel there are some prerequisites for offering good service. The first is to learn the industry from the bottom up. You must gain experience with all phases of the livestock operation. You must become production oriented rather than treatment oriented. It is important to think in terms of how to produce more milk or how to produce more weight gain,

Paper presented at the 21st Annual Conference, American Association of Bovine Practitioners, September 28–October 1, 1988, Calgary, Alberta, Canada

while at the same time thinking cost-effective. A consultant should be practical and not too idealistic. Being a consultant does not mean having a lot of bells and whistles to impress clients. It means that you offer simple, sound advice that aids management in operating a livestock operation profitably.

Another personal attribute that a consultant should develop is that of patience. You should work with that part of the operation which allows itself to change and improve. This may not be the most glaring problem area in the operation. Most of my consultation failures have been in trying to change things that do not readily change. This is why goal setting is so important to the success of a consultation program. Remember, though, if you can sell a little of the program to one client and change things a little, you are making progress.

In order to be called a consultant, you must act like a consultant. This means having a professional looking office and a practice vehicle. It means having professional employees that are good on the phone and nicely dressed. Veterinarians should look professional. Wear nice clothes, clean coveralls and boots, and conduct yourself in a professional manner. It is also critical that a consultant be punctual.

A production medicine consultant should become familiar with how production records are kept and how to analyze them. You should become familiar with how to use a computer and what types of computer record programs are used in your area. Find out what production parameters are most important to follow and graph them out on a regular basis. Learn to project future income based on production increases. Work with an accountant to do cost analysis for capital expenditures on an operation.

It is vitally important that a production medicine veterinarian sell himself to bankers. I sell myself to bankers by positively changing the cashflow for their livestock clients. I believe that in most cases the veterinarian's involvement with a livestock operation should only be after the producer's invitation because otherwise he may resent you as much as the banker.

It is helpful if a consultant uses a team approach rather than trying to take all responsibility himself. There are many other professionals offering service into the operation that you can call on to help solve problems and plan strategy. A partial list of these professionals would include university or teaching hospital personnel,

extension personnel, other veterinarians, feed dealers, nutritionists, equipment dealers and repairmen, AI technicians and semen distributors, testing laboratories, other agricultural consultants, accountants, bankers and attorneys.

In my opinion, offering veterinary consultative type service depends on breaking down existing barriers—foreign and domestic. Foreign barriers are those that our clients put up to defend against change. You must sell your clients on a new approach to animal health. You must make them realize that you are interested in their survival in agriculture, not just getting paid for a service rendered. The domestic barriers are those which you erect to rationalize your inability to change. You must sell yourself on yourself. You have to become an expert in all areas of production management. Gaining this expertise will take a considerable amount of time and hard work. When you really believe you have some answers that few others have, it is much easier to sell the program.

As the role of the food animal veterinarian changes to that of a consultant I think there are some important points to consider. A consultant must like people and enjoy working with them. You will be more involved with people and people problems than animals and animal problems. This is why it is important to determine your personality type and find out how to best relate with different individuals. A consultant must also "keep on the cutting edge." You must keep up with the new information and technology that is being developed and presented to the livestock industry. You must also be a

leader. It will become your responsibility to identify problem areas in management and also to see that they are fixed. It will mean coordinating your efforts with those of other professionals offering service into that operation. The consulting veterinarian should be innovative. You must be willing to accept new ideas and try new approaches. It will be important to keep up with your competition. I think it will be possible to offer consulting services in your local practice area. This will mean positioning yourself as the professional that your clients call on to answer production questions and problems.

In a time of changing practice style, I think it is important to define the role of family and God in your practice. Only you can define these roles in your life, but too often we as veterinarians do not take time to do it. Change can be very disturbing to ourselves and to our families. Open communication within the family can help alleviate some fears and frustrations. Also I believe that deepening our faith in God helps us to better accept change in our life and to complain less. Having a spiritual and ethical feeling in our practice can help it develop into a consulting practice. We need to show more compassion and caring for our fellow veterinarians and our employees. Our practice should be a "we" type business.

Production Medicine is a new and exciting field of veterinary medicine. We are only now starting to define what this field is and how to go about offering it as a service. The challenge is for those interested to get involved with forming this art into a proven, economically sound program for the livestock industry and the veterinary profession.