

Conducting a community survey

Periodically ask your healthcare team to survey five to six other practices in your area. Make the calls anonymously, away from the practice, for two reasons:

- 1) so your team members have the opportunity to truly experience what it's like to be a potential client of the practice they're calling; and
- 2) to ensure compliance with federal and state antitrust laws. (See note below.)

This market research project educates team members about the importance of a caller's impressions of a practice based on how his or her call is handled. It also provides a range of comparison fees for price-sensitive services in your community.

Assign two or more team members to each practice so you get multiple perspectives of each hospital and ask each team member to call at least three practices. Divide the fees among the callers. For example, one team member would be responsible for gathering information about canine vaccinations for his or her three practices, another would be responsible for the feline vaccination information for his or her three practices, and so on.

Using the survey form on the following pages, have each team member rate the receptionist receiving his or her call based on knowledge, friendliness, and effectiveness. What's the team member's impression of this practice based on how the receptionist handled the call? If your team member were looking for a hospital for his or her pet, would he or she choose this

practice? Why or why not? Did the receptionist handling the call offer to schedule an appointment?

Discuss the results of the community survey in your next staff meeting and consider how to apply what your team members learned. Then consider how callers would rate your practice.

One healthcare team recently completed a community survey as a continuing education program and reported that they liked when the receptionist handling their call created a dialogue by asking questions. They also noted the importance of clear, concise responses to their questions. "Some receptionists were difficult to get any information from. And being placed on hold immediately left us with a poor impression of the practice," staff members said.

Next, analyze the results of the community survey by highlighting the fees that are higher than yours in one color and the fees that are lower than yours in another color. Now you can quickly see where your fees are in comparison to the other practices.

Use the information from the community survey to guide your independent decisions about pricing competitive services in your practice. Ideally, your fees should fall between the middle and the high end of the range, depending on the quality of client service and patient care you offer. Remember that it's fine to charge as much as 10 percent to 15 percent more than other practices in your community as long as you offer a corresponding level of client service and patient care.

Note: A community survey is intended to assist your independent decisions about your practice. One very strong word of caution: Federal and state antitrust laws are designed to promote competition by prohibiting certain restraints of trade. Price fixing (or agreements among competitors concerning price or any part of price, such as discounts or credit terms) can result in criminal fines, imprisonment, and triple damages for offenders. Agreements about price do not have to be in writing. Oral agreements or "knowing winks" are enough to prove a violation. Competitors should never openly discuss their prices with one another because they may create the appearance of an agreement on prices.

Community survey

Your practice name: _____ Date completed: _____

Contact practices within a three- to five-mile radius that provide a similar quality of veterinary care.
Provide individual vaccine prices, not bundled prices, where applicable.

	Your practice	Practice 1	Practice 2	Practice 3	Practice 4	Practice 5
CANINE						
Medical/physical exam (E)						
Exam given with vaccinations (VE)						
DHLPP (D1)						
DAP (D3)						
Rabies—1 year (R1)						
Rabies—3 year (R3)						
Subtotal add VE + D1 + R1						
Subtotal add VE + D1 + R3						
Subtotal add VE + D3 + R1						
Ovariohysterectomy						
Please list additional services included in quoted price, such as overnight stay, blood work, anesthesia, monitoring, and medications.						
Neuter						
Please list additional services included in quoted price, such as overnight stay, blood work, anesthesia, monitoring, and medications.						
FELINE						
Medical/physical exam (E)						
Exam given with vaccinations (VE)						
FVRCP (F)						
Rabies—1 year (R1)						
Rabies—3 year (R3)						
FeLV vaccination (FL)						
Subtotal add VE + F + R1						
Subtotal add VE + F + R1 + FL						
Subtotal add VE + F + R3						
Subtotal add VE + F + R3 + FL						
Ovariohysterectomy						
Please list additional services included in quoted price, such as overnight stay, blood work, anesthesia, monitoring, and medications.						
Neuter						
Please list additional services included in quoted price, such as overnight stay, blood work, anesthesia, monitoring, and medications.						

Describe your impressions of your phone call with each receptionist.

	Practice 1	Practice 2	Practice 3	Practice 4	Practice 5
Describe the receptionist's tone of voice and demeanor. Was he or she friendly and happy to help? Were you thanked for calling?					
Describe the extent to which the receptionist tried to genuinely assist you over the phone or offer additional information you didn't request.					
Describe the timeliness of the phone call. Were you put on hold before being helped? Was the receptionist in a hurry during the conversation?					
Describe the extent of the receptionist's knowledge about the surveyed services. Were the answers clear and concise? Did he or she know all the answers?					
Did the receptionist use your name or the pet's name as the conversation progressed?	Yes No				
Did the receptionist offer to schedule an appointment?	Yes No				
Did the receptionist offer to mail you a brochure?	Yes No				
Additional notes					
Overall ranking for practice A=Excellent B=Good C=Needs improvement					

Answer the following about the comparison practice.

	Practice 1	Practice 2	Practice 3	Practice 4	Practice 5
Distance from your practice					
Number of doctors					
Evening hours (list hours)					
Quality of facility*					
Level of medicine*					
Range of services*					
Reputation in community					

Additional information

**Your perception in comparison to your practice.*