

## **“The Benefits of Diversity in Veterinary Private Practice”**

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### **Introduction**

In today's extremely tough economy, almost everyone is trying to find ways to earn and save money. The veterinary medical profession has been challenged with trying to maintain high practice standards while accommodating clients with limited budgets. Those veterinary practices committed to providing services to diverse clientele are thriving in today's economy. This lecture will focus on successful diversity-related issues used in the small ruminant and camelid mobile veterinary practice to increase revenue through our recent recession.

**Primary Practice Mission:** To provide the highest quality of veterinary care available for small ruminants (sheep and goats) and lamas (llamas, alpacas, guanacos, vicunas). This shall be done through the services provided to patients while educating the diverse clients in the practice.

**Diversity Goal:** The primary diversity goal of the practice is to provide educational experiences with small ruminants and camelids to students from diverse backgrounds that have interests in becoming veterinarians. This goal extends to providing all clients veterinary services for sheep, goats, llamas and alpacas. This is accomplished by providing information and outreach services to individuals that are members of underserved communities. Providing such services will help build bridges to diverse communities, making them feel connected to the veterinary profession.

**Diversity Benefits:** Most colleges of veterinary medicine require that applicants have contact time under the supervision of a veterinarian. Data indicates that there is an expectation by most admission committee members for each applicant to have some exposure to private veterinary practice. The challenges that many underrepresented minorities face when seeking private practice experiences tend to be greater than those of majority students interested in veterinary medicine.

**Positive Outcomes** – Many students gain knowledge and experience working with clients and species that they have never encountered. These experiences improve their qualifications for admission into veterinary college, expose them to different career options, increase their knowledge of veterinary medicine, introduce them to others with similar interests and teach them client communication skills. Clients get the opportunity to learn from diverse students, get assistance from students with their animals, become culturally competent and save money.

### **Practice Overview**

The Small Ruminant and Camelid Mobile Veterinary Service has over one hundred different student volunteers participating on private practice farm calls each year. Over fifty percent of these students self-identify as underrepresented minority (Black, Hispanic, Native American, Asian, GLBTQ, Male, Etc.). These individuals come from many diverse cultural backgrounds and speak many languages. The primary service vehicle used in the practice is a crew cab Chevrolet Silverado truck that is designed to comfortably and safely transport five passengers. There are always two seat spaces reserved specifically for underrepresented minority students. We currently have about one hundred fifty regular clients and see about four thousand patients per year. About sixty percent of these patients are companions, with seventy-five percent being goats.

### **Common Services Offered:**

Annual health examinations, health certificates, diagnostic services, hoof trimming, sedation shearing, ultrasound, dental treatments, health/practice seminars, pre-purchase evaluations, herd consultation visits, vaccinations, deworming, euthanasia services, etc.

### **Tips for attracting and retaining clients from diverse backgrounds:**

Specializing in care for sheep, goats and llamas provides numerous opportunities for care of these unique animals. The services offered are routinely modified to accommodate the specific needs of an individual client. Having a multicultural staff will greatly benefit any practice and its patients. You should:

1. Treat each client as they request to be treated
2. Get to know your clients and their family
3. Invite them to your practice
4. Celebrate their achievements
5. Communicate in their language when possible
6. Accept their invitations and gifts
7. Acknowledge their culture and show acceptance

## 8. Thank them for being your client

**Summary** – All clients appreciate being recognized for who they are along with their cultural heritage. Veterinarians take an oath to provide medical care to keep animals healthy and relieve them from suffering. It is imperative that our profession become appropriately trained to communicate with individuals from diverse cultures in order to address the needs of our global society. Otherwise we must better prepare our profession by training individuals that are competent to service these diverse clients and their needs. Having the ability to work with individuals from diverse backgrounds will greatly contribute to the growth of any veterinary business.