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Staff Paper

**Small Animal Client Satisfaction at the
Veterinary Teaching Hospital,
Michigan State University -
July 1, 1999 through June 30, 2000**

James Lloyd, Debra Donovan, Youssouf Camara,
Delta Leeper, Renee Gross

Staff Paper 2001-33

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30 pages

Introduction

Understanding clients' wants and needs is vital to the sustained success of any service business, and veterinary medicine offers no exception. The Veterinary Teaching Hospital (VTH) at the Michigan State University College of Veterinary Medicine (MSU-CVM) has successfully maintained a position at the forefront of the veterinary profession throughout most of its history. The staff has consistently been composed of clinicians who have been chosen because of their excellence and expertise. However, the assumption that emphasis on clinical excellence will, by itself, provide the foundation for sustained success in the client flow and business at the hospital has been unchallenged to date. In order to provide the best possible customer service, our clients' likes, dislikes, wants, and needs must be fully characterized and quantified.

To assess client satisfaction with the VTH, a study was designed whose objective was to identify the areas in the VTH that are most valued and highly regarded versus those that need improvement in order to sustain the current success of the small animal hospital. The results of this study can be used as an outline for the development of a plan to maintain and improve customer satisfaction and, ultimately, to sustain the teaching caseload and business of the hospital. In addition, this endeavor will serve to set a good example for our students by modeling the best management practices and establishing a critical blend of quality medicine/surgery and customer service.

Methods

Survey Development

Three focus group meetings were held during 1998 and 1999 to determine key issues pertaining to client satisfaction for consideration by the small animal clinic. The first meeting involved officers and members of the board of directors of the Michigan Veterinary Medical

Association (MVMA). The second focus group was composed of selected small animal practitioners who were among the top users of the VTH services. In addition, several leading practitioners outside this group were included who offered good insight into community wants and needs. The third meeting involved the CVM alumni council.

Information obtained from the focus group meetings was used to identify a list of important survey topics. Based on this list and a questionnaire designed and used in 1995 by Dr. Cheri Johnson (small animal chief of staff in the VTH at that time), the small animal client questionnaire was developed in June 2000 by CVM staff (see Appendix A).

Sample Selection

One thousand (1000) small animal clients who used the services of the MSU-VTH during the July 1, 1999- June 30, 2000 fiscal year were selected by a simple random process to receive questionnaires by mail. The initial survey was mailed on July 27, 2000. Nine hundred eighty-three (983) of the 1000 selected were deliverable. This number represents 12% of all small animal clients seen during the 1999-2000 fiscal year. To follow up, survey recipients were mailed post cards as reminders two weeks after the initial survey was sent.

Data

Data entry was completed for the returned surveys. Tables and graphs were constructed to display these results (see results section). Descriptive statistics were performed on all questions/responses and comparative statistics were completed for selected topics.

Results

Response Rates

Responses were received from 362 of the 983 small animal clients surveyed, for a response rate of 37%.

Client Information

Of the 350 respondents who provided information on their gender, 76% were female and 24% were male. Clients aged 35-50 years were the most frequent respondents to our survey (43%), followed by clients > 50 years old (32%). Clients 35 years and older accounted for 75% of survey respondents. Clients 25-35 years old comprised 20% of respondents with the least frequent respondents being those < 25 years old (5%). Almost two-thirds of clients were married (64%); 31% listed themselves as single, 3% were divorced, and 2% were widowed. Two-thirds of clients had no children under the age of 18 living with them.

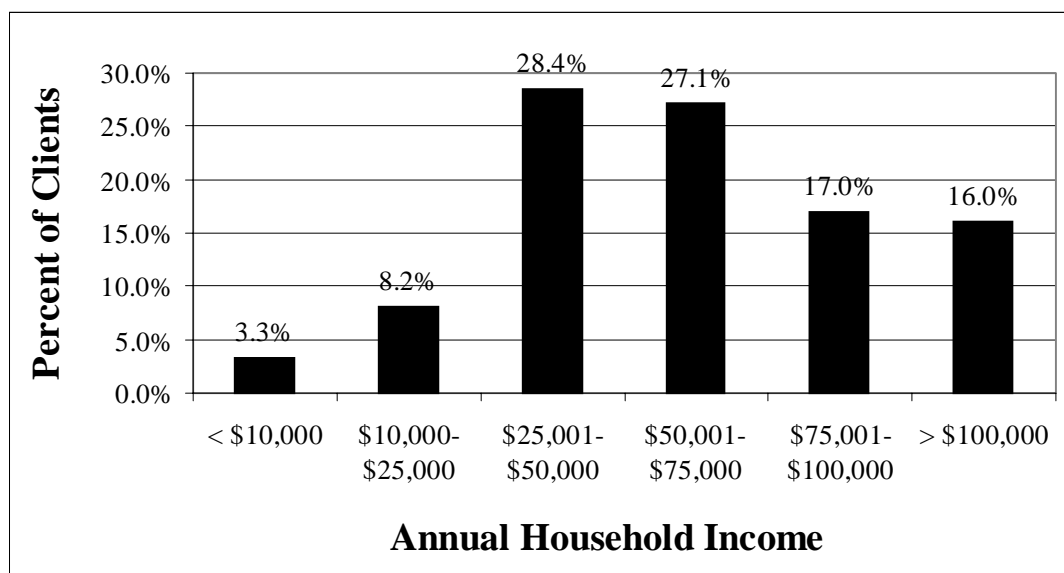


Figure 1. Small animal client annual household income distribution (based on 306 client responses)

The majority of small animal clients (88.5%) had an annual household income of \$25,000 or greater, with 60.1% of clients having an annual household income of more than \$50,000; 55.5% of clients had an annual household income between \$25,000 and \$75,000. Only 11.5% of clients had an annual household income of less than \$25,000 including 3.3% with an annual household income of less than \$10,000. Figure 1 summarizes these data.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 below depicts the most recent visit by responding clients to the MSU-VTH within the 1999-2000 fiscal year. Eighty-five percent (85%) of clients had their most recent visit to the VTH more than two months prior to the survey date, with 47% occurring greater than six months previously. Less than 15% had visited the VTH within the preceding month.

Table 1. Most recent visit to the MSU-VTH by small animal clients

Most recent visit	Frequency	Percent
Last week	14	3.9
Last month	39	10.9
2 to 5 months	138	38.4
6 to 12 months	168	46.8

The number of animals, broken down by species, owned by clients of the MSU-VTH is depicted in Table 2. Note that these numbers represent the total number of animals currently in the household, not the number of animals presented to the VTH for treatment.

Table 2. Animals currently in the household

Species of Animal	Total # in survey population	Minimum # per household	Maximum # per household	Mean # per household
Dogs	631	0	19	1.74
Cats	319	0	9	0.88
Horses	68	0	13	0.19
Other small mammals (e.g. rabbits, ferrets)	54	0	14	0.15
Birds	41	0	7	0.11
Reptiles and Amphibians	15	0	4	0.04

Of the 1,128 total animals represented, dogs were the most common pet, with a mean of 1.74 dogs per household, followed by cats with a mean of 0.88 per household. Reptiles and amphibians were the least common pet in our survey population. Approximately one-third of those surveyed owned a single pet with most (63.5%) clients owning multiple pets of the same or different species. Slightly more than 3% of clients reported that they did not own any pets at the time of the survey. Figure 2 provides an overview of the number of animals per household.

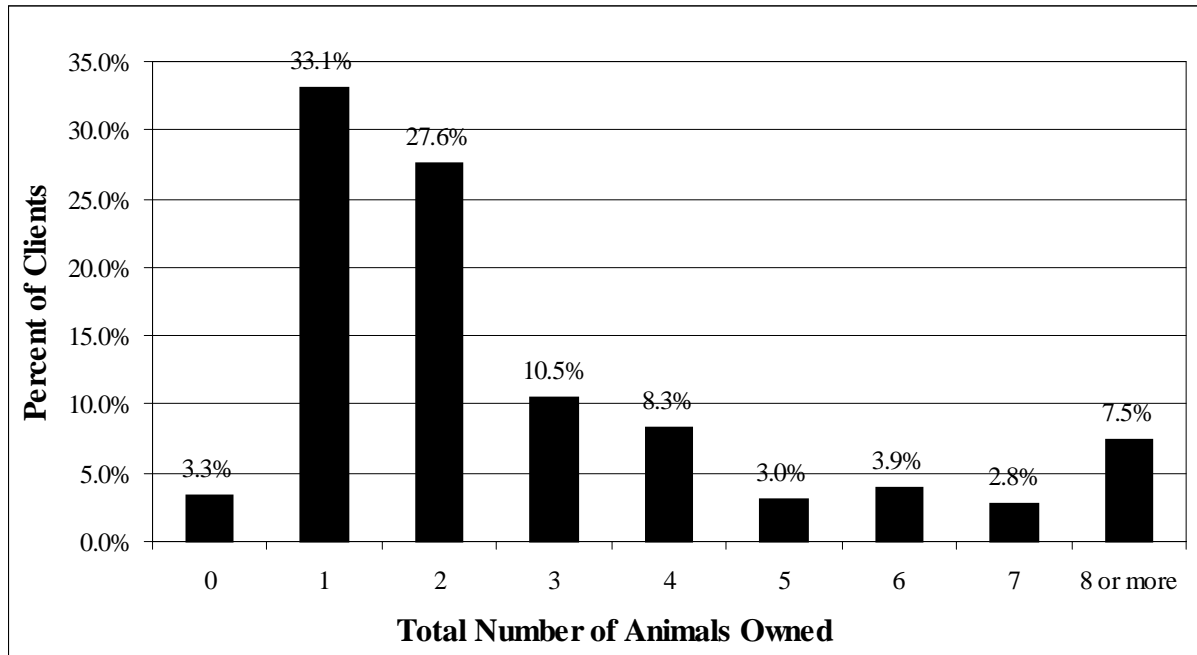


Figure 2. Total number of animals per household, regardless of species.

When asked how many times they had visited the MSU-VTH in the past two years, the mean number of visits was 2.39 (median = 1, standard deviation = 3.48).

Client responses

The client responses reported below are based on the clients' most recent visit to the MSU small animal hospital.

Dogs were the most frequent species (85.2%) presented to the VTH, with cats a distant second (12.5%). Reptiles or amphibians and birds were the least frequently presented (0.3%).

Table 3 summarizes the species of patient presented to the MSU small animal hospital.

Table 3. Species of animal presented to the MSU-VTH

Species of patient	Frequency	Percent
Dog	306	85.2
Cat	45	12.5
Other small mammal	6	1.7
Reptile or amphibian	1	0.3
Bird	1	0.3

Clients were asked to provide the name of the primary MSU veterinarian who treated their pet. Two hundred thirteen (213) usable responses were obtained and are summarized in Table 4. Some respondents provided more than one veterinarian's name. The veterinarians seen most frequently by clients were Dr. Mostosky (radiology), Dr. DeCamp (orthopedics), Dr. Olivier (cardiology), Dr. Flo (orthopedics), and Dr. David Ramsey (ophthalmology).

Table 4. Primary MSU veterinarian seen by small animal clients on their most recent visit.

Clinician	Frequency	%	Clinician	Frequency	%
Mostosky, U.V.	19	8.9	Johnson, Allen	5	2.3
DeCamp, Charles	14	6.6	Mison, Michael	5	2.3
Olivier, Bari	11	5.2	Reif, Ullrich	5	2.3
Flo, Gretchen	10	4.7	Rice, Cheryl	5	2.3
Ramsey, David	10	4.7	Stanley, Bryden	5	2.3
Petersen, Annette	8	3.8	Coronado, George	4	1.9
Chadwick, Valerie	7	3.3	Johnson, Cheri	4	1.9
Eyster, George	7	3.3	Rosser, Ed	4	1.9
Hendee, Jennifer	7	3.3	Wood, Sheri	4	1.9
O'Handley, Pat	7	3.3	Anderson, Lorel	3	1.4
Petersen-Jones, Simon	7	3.3	Hauptman, Joe	3	1.4
Stokes, Jennifer	7	3.3	Holsworth, Ian	3	1.4
Bolliger, Christian	6	2.8	Warzee, Christine	3	1.4
Braden, Terry	6	2.8	Dejardin, Loic	2	0.9
Cassotis, Nick	6	2.8	Harris, Barbara	2	0.9
Walshaw, Richard	6	2.8	Kruger, John	2	0.9
Carter, Candace	6	2.8	Reimer, S. Brent	2	0.9
Bloom, Paul	5	2.3	Other veterinarians (n=15)	14	6.6

The majority of the respondents (67.7%) chose the MSU-VTH because their primary veterinarian referred them. A much smaller number used the services at the VTH because it had emergency/after-hours service (8.3%), it was recommended by a friend or family member (8.0%), or because it was their primary veterinarian (7.2%). Table 5 summarizes these data.

Table 5. Reasons why clients chose MSU-VTH to care for their pet.

Reason	Frequency	Percent
Primary veterinarian referral	245	67.7
Recommendation by a friend or family member	29	8.0
MSU hospital is primary veterinarian	26	7.2
Other:		
Emergency/after hours	30	8.3
MSU reputation	12	3.3
OFA certified x-rays	8	2.2
Cost reasonable	7	1.9
Best treatment available	5	1.4
Location	5	1.4
Client is student/alumnus	4	1.1
Used in past and happy with service	4	1.1
Referred by other than a friend/family member	4	1.1
New to area	2	0.6
X-rays	2	0.6

The most frequent services used by clients included x-rays and other imaging (39%), laboratory tests (29%), and surgery (28.5%). Table 6 summarizes these data. Other services not specifically listed were used 11% of the time.

Table 6. Services used by MSU-VTH clients.

Service	Frequency	%	Service	Frequency	%
X-rays, other imaging	141	39.0	Second opinion	33	9.1
Laboratory tests	105	29.0	Annual exam	31	8.6
Surgery*	103	28.5	Non-emergency illness	31	8.6
Other	51	14.1	Dermatology	29	8.0
Orthopedic	39	10.8	Vaccinations	27	7.5
Spay/neuter	9	2.5	Neurology	21	5.8
Emergency	75	20.7	Dentistry	7	1.9
Hospitalization	68	18.8	Reproductive evaluation	3	0.8
Cardiology	42	11.6	Euthanasia	3	0.8
Ophthalmology	41	11.3			
Cancer diagnosis and/or treatment	36	9.9	Other	11	3.0

* 6 respondents (1.1%) did not specify the type of surgery

Overall, the cost of the most recent visit to the MSU-VTH, based on client recall, ranged from \$0 to \$5000 with a mean cost of \$535.66. However, approximately 50% of clients spent \$250 or less on services. Figure 3 displays these data.

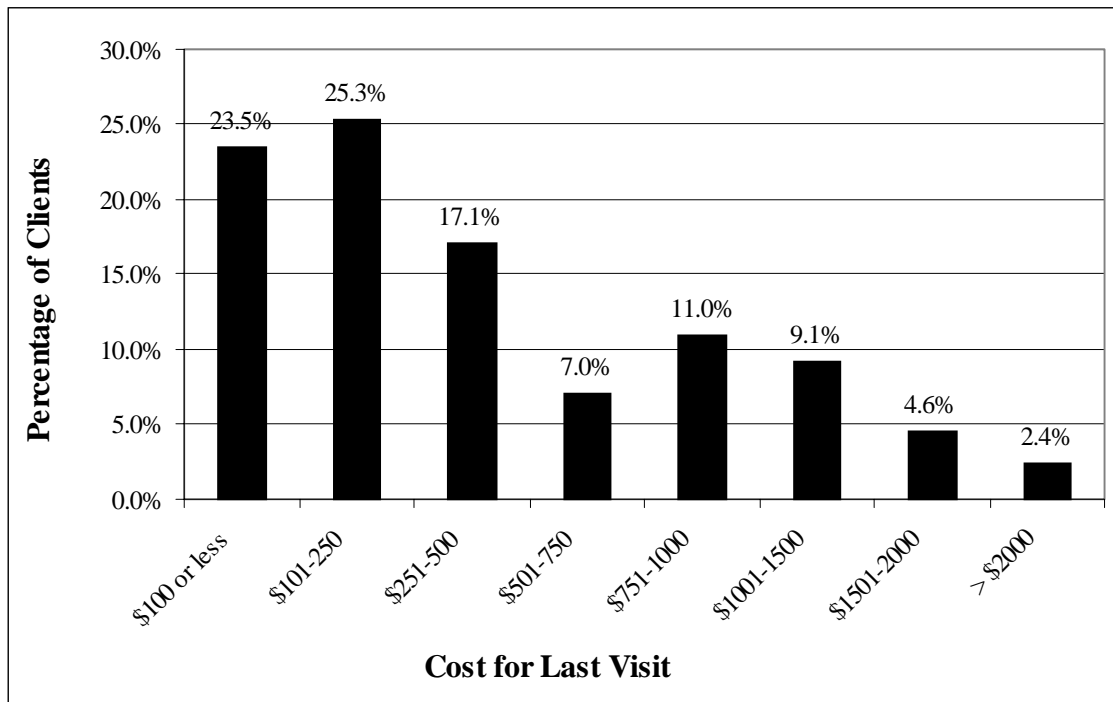


Figure 3. Distribution of total cost of services (based on client recall) for the most recent visit to the MSU-VTH.

For dogs, the cost of the visit ranged from \$0 to a maximum of \$5000 with a mean of \$583.72; cat owners spent less with a minimum cost of \$13, a maximum of \$1700, and a mean of \$356.24.

Clients were asked to rate various aspects of their most recent experience at the MSU-VTH. These data are summarized in Table 7.

Table 7. Clients' level of agreement with various aspects of the VTH experience

		Percentage of Clients			
Aspect of MSU-VTH most recent experience:*	n	SA	A	D	SD
Customer Service					
Able to reach the appointment desk by phone without difficulty	321	41.4	51.1	4.4	3.1
Treated courteously on the phone	334	52.7	44.0	1.8	1.5
Phone staff answered questions satisfactorily	331	46.8	48.0	2.4	2.7
Able to find the Veterinary Teaching Hospital without difficulty	355	42.0	51.0	5.6	1.4
The hours of the Veterinary Teaching Hospital are convenient	347	39.2	52.4	7.2	1.2
Able to find a parking spot without difficulty	356	43.3	46.3	7.6	2.8
The waiting area was clean and comfortable	355	50.4	47.6	1.4	0.6
Patient Care					
Seen by a senior vet student or veterinarian in a timely manner	353	43.6	44.5	9.3	2.5
Medical staff was thorough in examining pet and obtaining information about its condition	354	65.0	32.5	1.1	1.4
The veterinary student who saw the pet was courteous and friendly	348	74.4	24.1	0.6	0.9
The veterinarian who saw the pet was courteous and friendly	354	69.5	27.4	1.4	1.7
Client's pet was handled with care and respect	359	72.4	25.3	1.4	0.8
Pet's problems were explained in understandable language	356	67.7	29.2	2.0	1.1
Treatment options for pet were clearly explained	340	63.5	32.6	1.8	2.1
(If pet was hospitalized:) Reports on pet's medical progress were provided in a timely manner	189	64.6	30.7	3.7	1.1
Clear discharge instructions were given	298	58.7	37.9	1.7	1.7
Amount of time spent at the hospital was not excessively long	342	39.8	46.2	10.5	3.5
Fees for Services Provided					
The fee system was clearly explained and an estimate of total costs was given prior to treatment	335	42.7	43.3	12.2	1.8
(If pet was hospitalized:) Cost estimates were revised and explained in a clear and timely manner	176	43.8	52.8	1.7	1.7
A fair price for services provided to pet was paid	349	34.7	57.0	5.7	2.6
Overall Satisfaction with the MSU-VTH					
Would return to the Veterinary Teaching Hospital with a pet	353	61.5	33.7	2.0	2.8
Would recommend the Veterinary Teaching Hospital to friends	356	64.6	31.5	1.4	2.5

*n = number of responses; SA = strongly agree; A = agree; D = disagree; SD = strongly disagree

In general, satisfaction with the VTH was quite high. Most clients agreed or strongly agreed with the following aspects of their VTH experience:

- ✓ the veterinary student that saw my pet was courteous and friendly (98.6%)
- ✓ waiting area was clean and comfortable (98.0%)
- ✓ my pet was handled with care and respect (97.8%)
- ✓ medical staff was thorough in examining my pet and obtaining information about its condition (97.5%)
- ✓ my pet's problems were explained to me in language that I could understand (96.9%)
- ✓ the veterinarian who saw my pet was courteous and friendly (96.9%)
- ✓ I was treated courteously on the phone (96.7%)
- ✓ I was given clear discharge ("go-home") instructions (96.6%)
- ✓ Treatment options for my pet were clearly explained to me (96.2%)

When asked an open-ended question about which two things clients liked most about their last visit to the VTH, 294 responses were received. Clients' responses are listed in Table 8 in order of decreasing frequency of response. "Staff attitude and caring" was the most frequently cited response by 36.5% of clients, followed by "care of the pet" (18.5%), "students' attitude/helpfulness" (17.7%), "thorough explanation/answered clients' questions" (13.3%), and "knowledge and expertise of staff" (10.5%). Kudos to Drs. Mostosky, Flo, O'Handley, C. Johnson, D. Ramsey, Stokes and R. Walshaw who were specifically mentioned as one of the things clients liked most about their last visit to the VTH.

Table 8. Aspects that clients liked most about their last visit to the VTH

Comment by client	Frequency	%*	Comment by client	Frequency	%*
Staff attitude, caring	132	36.5	Clean facilities	9	2.5
Care of pet	67	18.5	Follow up	8	2.2
Students' attitude, helpfulness	64	17.7	Location / easily accessible	6	1.7
Thorough explanation, answered clients' questions	48	13.3	Dr. Mostosky	5	1.4
Knowledge & expertise of staff	38	10.5	Honesty	5	1.4
Professionalism	25	6.9	Dr. Flo	4	1.1
Prompt/quick service	20	5.5	Ability to get Dr. on phone	3	0.8
Thorough exam	19	5.2	Surgery success	3	0.8
Respect for owner	19	5.2	Dr. O'Handley	2	0.6
Reasonable cost	15	4.1	Dr. C. Johnson	2	0.6
Updates	14	3.9	Dr. D. Ramsey	2	0.6
Hours	11	3.0	Ability to be with animal	2	0.6
Diagnosis / trust of it	11	3.0	Ease of getting an appt.	2	0.6
Quality service	11	3.0	Dr. Stokes	1	0.3
Technology	9	2.5	Dr. R. Walshaw	1	0.3
Saved animal's life	9	2.5			

* Percent is based on 362 total surveys returned.

From Table 7, clients were most dissatisfied (either disagreed or strongly disagreed) with the following aspects of their experience at the MSU-VTH:

- the amount of time spent at the hospital was not excessively long (14.0%)
- fee system was clearly explained to me and I was given an estimate of total costs prior to treatment (13.7%)
- seen by a senior veterinary student or veterinarian in a timely manner, consistent with my appointment time (11.9%)
- able to find a parking spot without difficulty (10.4%)
- convenient hours at the VTH (8.4%)
- paid a fair price for the services provided to my pet (8.1%)
- able to reach the appointment desk by phone without difficulty (7.5%)

- able to find the VTH without difficulty (7.0%)
- the phone staff answered my questions satisfactorily (5.1%)

Only 4.8% of clients would not return to the MSU-VTH with a pet for treatment and 3.9% would not recommend the MSU-VTH to a friend or relative.

A widely accepted tenet in consumer marketing holds that, for any given business, approximately 80% of the business originates from 20% of the customers. As such, the wants and needs of customers in the top 20% are of particular interest, based on the critical value of this group to the health of the business. In this study, it turned out that clients in the top 20% (based on cost of most recent visit) represented 58% of the business (based on total cost of all most recent visits, summed across all respondents). When responses of this top 20% were analyzed as a distinct subset, the results of Table 7 were only found to be different from the entire respondent pool (by Chi-squared analysis) with regard to explanation of the fee system. As it turns out, the top 20% were more inclined to agree that the fee system had been clearly explained and an estimate provided prior to treatment.

To further investigate attitudes toward price, an analysis was performed comparing “income level” and response to “fair price was paid for services provided.” Overall, 91.7% of responding clients felt they paid a fair price for services provided, while 8.3% did not think they paid a fair price. Among the respondents who felt they did not pay a fair price for services:

- 20.8% had an annual income less than or equal to \$25,000
- 33.3% had an annual income between \$25,000 and \$75,000
- 45.8% had an annual income greater than or equal to \$75,000

A Chi-squared test was performed comparing the distribution of annual household incomes for all clients who responded to the survey (see Figure 1) to the same distribution for only those

clients who did not think they paid a fair price for services. The results indicated that the two groups were not significantly different.

When clients were asked an open-ended question about which two things they would change about the VTH, 194 responses were received. Clients' responses are listed in Table 9. The most frequently cited changes that clients would like to make included lowering the cost of services (11.0%), having satellite offices (10.2%), reducing the waiting time (9.9%), providing more parking (6.1%) and extending business hours to include weekends (5.0%). Only two people commented that they would add pet insurance.

Table 9. VTH aspects that clients would change

Comment by client	Frequency	%*	Comment by client	Frequency	%*
Costs too much	40	11.0	Long wait between student and Dr.	5	1.4
Too far away	37	10.2	No oncology department	4	1.1
Wait was too long	36	9.9	Dr. talked down to client	4	1.1
Not enough parking	22	6.1	Not able to be with pet during procedures	4	1.1
Inconvenient hours – need to extend	18	5.0	Keep appointment with Dr. they were told	3	0.8
Difficulty getting appointment	15	4.1	Appointments too long	3	0.8
Difficult getting in touch with Dr.	9	2.5	Dr. talked too technically	2	0.6
Front desk staff was mean / unprofessional	8	2.2	Need to separate animals in the waiting room	2	0.6
Difficult to find VTH	8	2.2	Refund was slow	2	0.6
No payment plan	7	1.9	Add pet insurance	2	0.6
Insufficient staff	7	1.9	Smell of the hospital	2	0.6
Improve waiting room décor / make more comfortable	5	1.4			

* Percent is based on 362 total surveys returned.

Thirty-six of the 40 clients who wished to lower costs provided information on the cost of their most recent visit. The clients' bills ranged from \$0 - \$5,000 (based on client recall) with a mean cost of \$866.50. However, 50% of those clients had bills less than \$500 (see Figure 4).

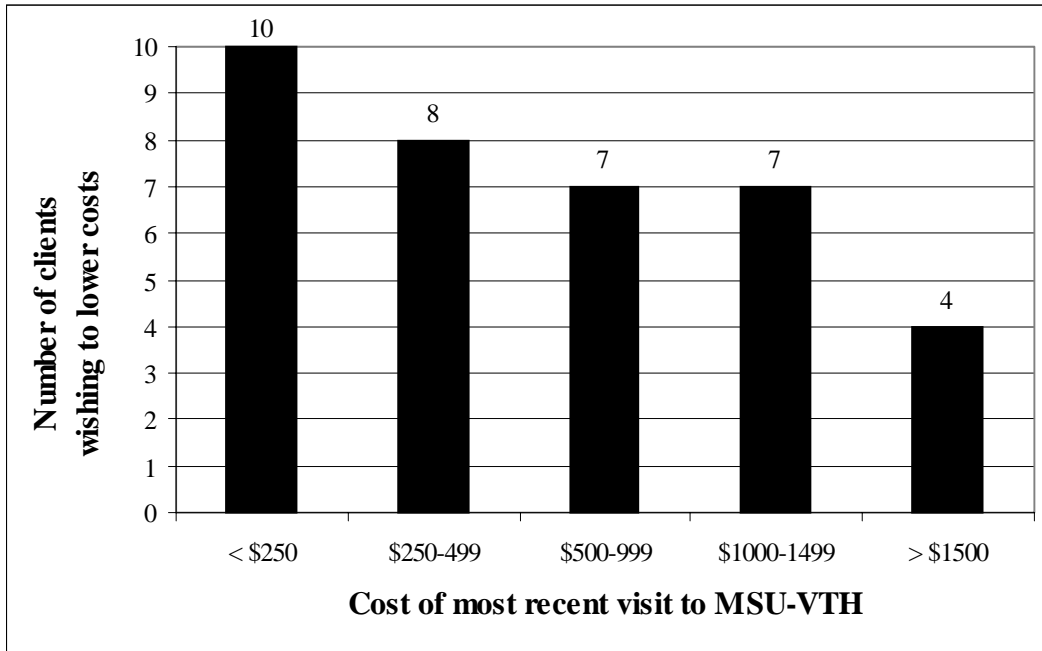


Figure 4. Clients' costs on the most recent visit to the MSU-VTH for those clients who wished to lower the cost of services.

Thirty-one of the 40 clients who wished to lower costs provided information on their annual household income. These data are summarized in Figure 5.

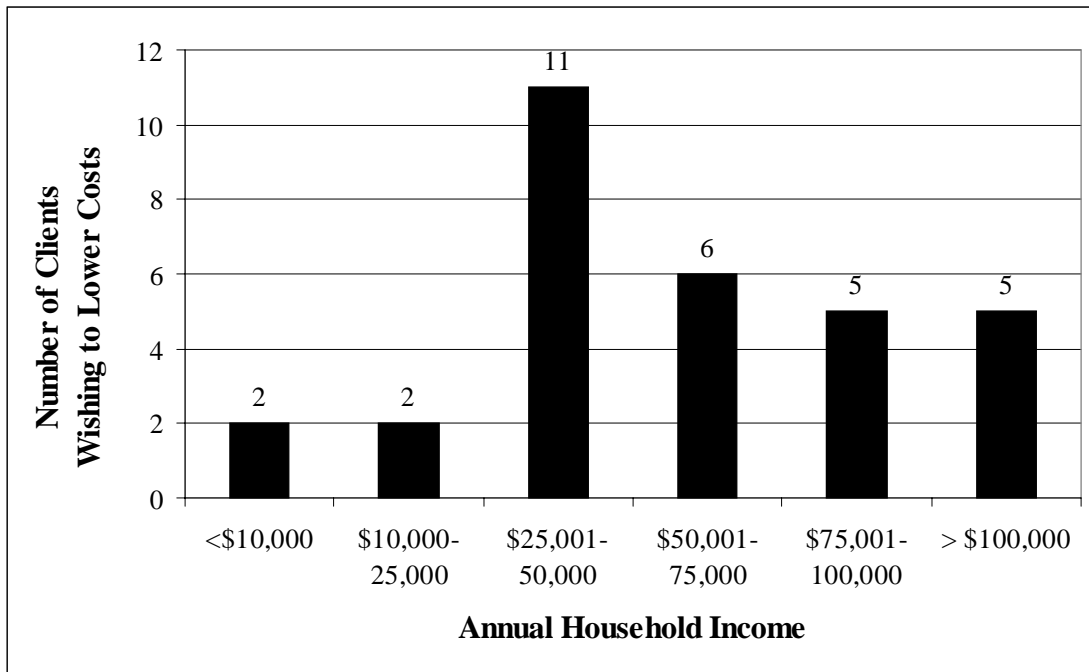


Figure 5. Annual household income distribution for clients who wished to lower the cost of services

Clients ranked the factors in Table 10 below according to what that they felt were the most important when choosing a primary-care veterinarian. “Reputation of the veterinarian for high-quality service” (52.5%), “a respectful and informative veterinarian” (16.0%), and “a gentle and kind veterinarian” (10.2%) ranked among the top three. Overall, price as a choice factor ranked 7th in terms of importance. Less than half (44.5%) of the respondents listed “price of services” among their top five considerations for choosing a primary-care veterinarian. “How long the appointment will take” ranked 10th out of ten, with only 1.4% of respondents listing this as their primary consideration for choosing a veterinarian. Other factors that ranked lowest in selecting a primary-care veterinarian included: “convenient hours of operation” (2.5%) and “recommendation from a friend or relative” (3.9%).

Table 10. Most important factors when choosing a primary care veterinarian

Factor	Ranked as #1	Ranked in top 5
Reputation of veterinarian for high-quality care	52.5%	76.2%
Veterinarian is respectful and informative	16.0%	75.7%
Veterinarian is kind and gentle	10.2%	77.9%
How soon an appointment can be scheduled	7.2%	49.2%
Location of clinic	5.5%	41.2%
Range of services offered by veterinarian	4.7%	49.2%
Price of services	4.4%	44.5%
Recommendation from a friend or relative	3.9%	18.8%
Convenient hours of operation	2.5%	33.4%
How long the appointment will take	1.4%	14.4%

When clients were asked if they had declined treatment recommended by the veterinarian because the cost was too high, 20.9% (74 out of 354 respondents) said they had, while 79.1% had not. Only 8.5% (30 out of 353 respondents) reported they had euthanized an animal because the cost of treatment was too high. An analysis comparing income level with whether a client declined treatment or elected euthanasia was performed:

- ❖ 15% of clients whose income level was less than \$10,000 had declined a recommended treatment because the cost was too high compared to 20% of clients whose income level was more than \$100,000.
- ❖ 4% of clients whose income level was less than \$10,000 had an animal euthanized because the cost of treatment was too high compared to 10% of clients whose income level was more than \$100,000.

Discussion

Roughly one-third (362) of the 983 deliverable surveys were completed and returned to us. Overall, this represents a response rate of 37%. However, the total number of respondents varied between questions because all respondents did not respond to all questions. The most frequent respondent was likely to be a married female, aged 35 years or older, with no children under the age of 18 living at home, and an annual income of \$25,000 or greater.

Varying degrees of recall bias may be present in our survey results, due to the fact that 85% of those surveyed had visited the VTH more than two months prior to the survey date. Of this 85%, 47% had visited the VTH more than six months previously. For example, only 212 out of 362 clients surveyed provided the name of the primary MSU veterinarian who saw their pet. Some respondents indicated that they could not remember or simply left this question blank. Among those who provided a response, Drs. Mostosky, DeCamp, Olivier, Flo and David Ramsey were the most frequently seen veterinarians.

Overall, the cost of the most recent visit to the MSU-VTH ranged from \$0 to \$5000, with a mean cost of \$535.66. The mean amount spent if the patient was a dog was \$583.72, and \$356.24 if the patient was a cat. In fact, VTH business records indicate that the mean charge per small animal case during the 1999-2000 fiscal year was about \$300. As such, results of this

study indicate that either a recall or sampling bias may exist. Potential implications of these possible sources of bias should be kept in mind when interpreting the study's findings.

Higher expenditures do not necessarily reflect an owner's willingness to spend more on one species than the other. The difference in mean amount spent could be due to relative mean patient size (dogs vs. cats); the larger the animal, the larger the amount of anesthesia, fluids, medications, etc. that will be needed, and therefore the more expensive the visit.

Dogs were the most common pet owned by those surveyed, with cats in second place. Dogs were also the most frequently presented species to the VTH accounting for 84.3% of all small animals presented. Cats were the second most common species presented at 12.6%. Approximately one-third of those surveyed owned a single pet with roughly two-thirds of clients owning multiple pets. Additionally, 6.6% of our small animal clients also owned horses.

The mean number of visits during the past two years was 2.39 (median = 1), according to respondents. Some clients did not enter a specific number, but indicated "many" or "10+". These responses were not included in the calculated mean.

Our largest source of clients came from referrals, accounting for 67.7% of all small animal clients. In that regard, a survey of over 1000 small animal veterinarians in Michigan has also been conducted and will be reported separately. The percentage of persons that chose MSU-VTH based on its reputation (3.3%) or the fact that they had visited us previously and were happy with the service received (1.1%) may have been larger if these were listed reasons from which to choose. Clients that selected either of these as their main reason for visiting the VTH did so under the "other" category. Less than 10% of small animal clients chose MSU-VTH based on our emergency/after-hours service. However, greater than 20% of clients actually used the emergency service, but chose MSU-VTH for other reasons. These small numbers may be

due to the fact that many veterinarians in the Lansing area are open evenings and weekends, allowing clients with an emergency to bring their pet to their regular veterinarian, rather than an emergency veterinary clinic. Other emergency veterinary facilities available in the Lansing area, such as Lansing Veterinary Urgent Care, combined with the fact that 7% of clients surveyed indicated they had difficulty finding the VTH, may also contribute to this low number.

The fact that x-rays and other diagnostic imaging (39%) and laboratory tests (29%) were the services used most frequently is not surprising, because many specialties use these services in reaching a diagnosis. The services used least frequently were euthanasia (0.8%), reproductive evaluation (0.8%), and dentistry (1.9%). We may want to further examine these areas to determine why clients are not using them as much. Bear in mind that overall satisfaction with a particular service may be related to its frequency of use. High levels of satisfaction might logically lead to higher levels of use for a given level of demand. Low levels of satisfaction may tend to limit caseload.

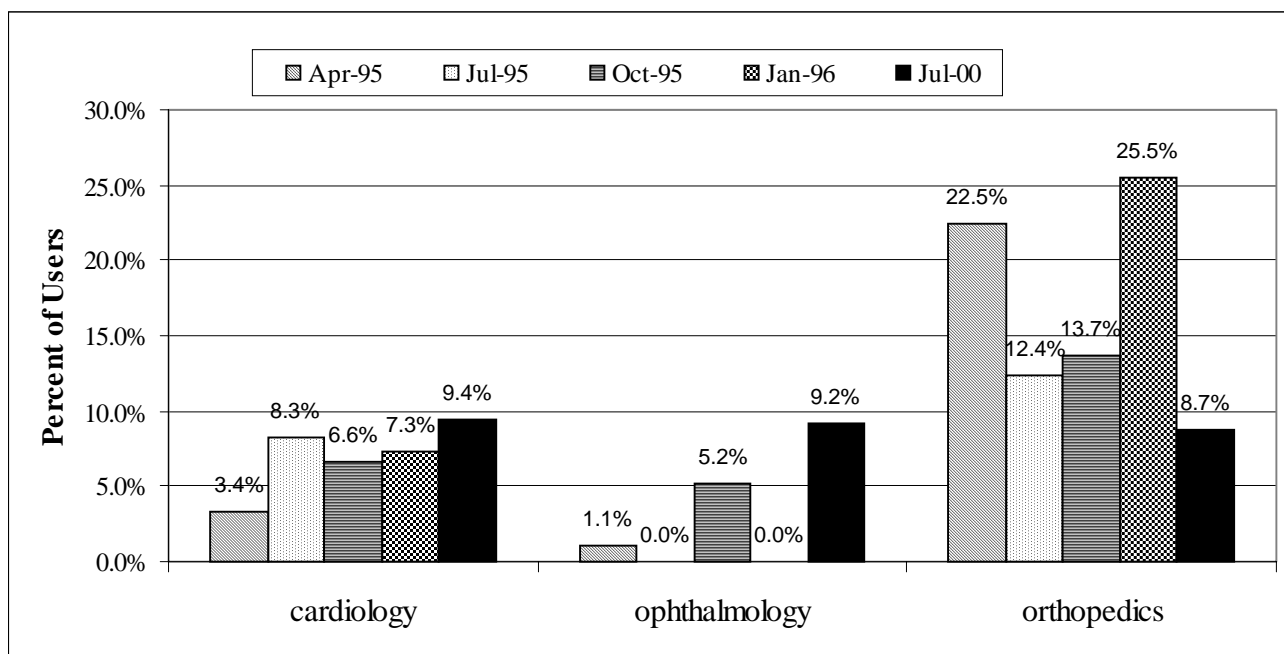


Figure 6. Specialty services most frequently used by clients - comparison of current survey results with previous surveys conducted in 1995 and 1996.

The specialties most frequently used by clients were orthopedics, cardiology, and ophthalmology. Some clients used more than one service. Figure 6 breaks down responses by specialty and presents these data with data obtained from previous surveys conducted in 1995 and 1996. Before comparing the current data with those collected previously, it bears mention that the sampling methods employed then were markedly different. Recall that the current study used a random sample of one year's clients. The previous studies sampled all clients during four separate months via exit survey. These differences somewhat limit the direct comparability of the data obtained. Also, when considering the results in Figure 6, note that the 8.7% orthopedics value for the July-00 survey represents surgeries only and does not include non-surgical cases.

The objective of our retrospective study was to identify the areas of the VTH that were most valued versus those that are in need of improvement. Additionally, we wanted to consider the results of this survey in light of those obtained with the exit surveys conducted in 1995 and 1996. To do this, a mean score for each question was calculated as follows:

$$\frac{(\# \text{ of SA's} \times 4) + (\# \text{ of A's} \times 3) + (\# \text{ of D's} \times 2) + (\# \text{ of SD's})}{\# \text{ of respondents to that question}}$$

where: each "strongly agree" (SA) response was worth 4 points

each "agree" (A) was worth 3 points

each "disagree" (D) was worth 2 points, and

each "strongly disagree" (SD) was worth 1 point

The higher the mean, the more satisfied clients were with that aspect of their experience. For example, a score of 4.0 would indicate that all clients strongly agreed with the statement, whereas a score of 1.0 would indicate that all clients strongly disagreed. Because previous surveys contained questions with slightly different wording, it was sometimes necessary to combine mean scores from this survey in order to compare the results with past surveys.

Additionally, scores from previous surveys were converted to the scale used for this survey according to the following formula: $\text{new scale} = 5 - \text{original survey score}$. Again, it should be noted that a different sampling method was used for the previous surveys conducted in 1995 and 1996. These were exit surveys completed by all clients at the conclusion of their MSU-VTH visit. Each of these surveys covers a one-month period, whereas the Jul-00 survey covers an entire year.

Our survey results show that the most valued areas according to respondents are:

- both the student and the veterinarian who saw my pet were courteous and friendly and handled my pet with care and respect (3.7)**
- medical staff thoroughly examined my pet and obtained information about its condition (3.6)
- my pet's problems were explained to me in language that I could understand and treatment options were clearly explained to me (3.6)
- I would return to the VTH and would recommend it to friends/family (3.6)

** Numbers in parentheses following a statement indicate the overall satisfaction score among those surveyed.

Clients were also fairly satisfied with the following aspects of their VTH experience:

- I was treated courteously on the phone and my questions were satisfactorily answered (3.5)
- the waiting area was clean and comfortable (3.5)
- I was given clear discharge ("go home") instructions (3.5)
- If my pet was hospitalized, I received progress reports and cost estimate updates in a timely manner (3.5)

Results for the most highly regarded aspects of our clients' visit to the VTH are presented in Figure 7. Because of the different sampling methods, the results of the current survey cannot be rigorously compared to the previous studies with great confidence. However, in a qualitative sense, results of the current survey indicate that scores may be drifting further from the 4.0 mark and slowly approaching the 3.5 mark, raising the question as to whether or not client satisfaction may be decreasing slightly.

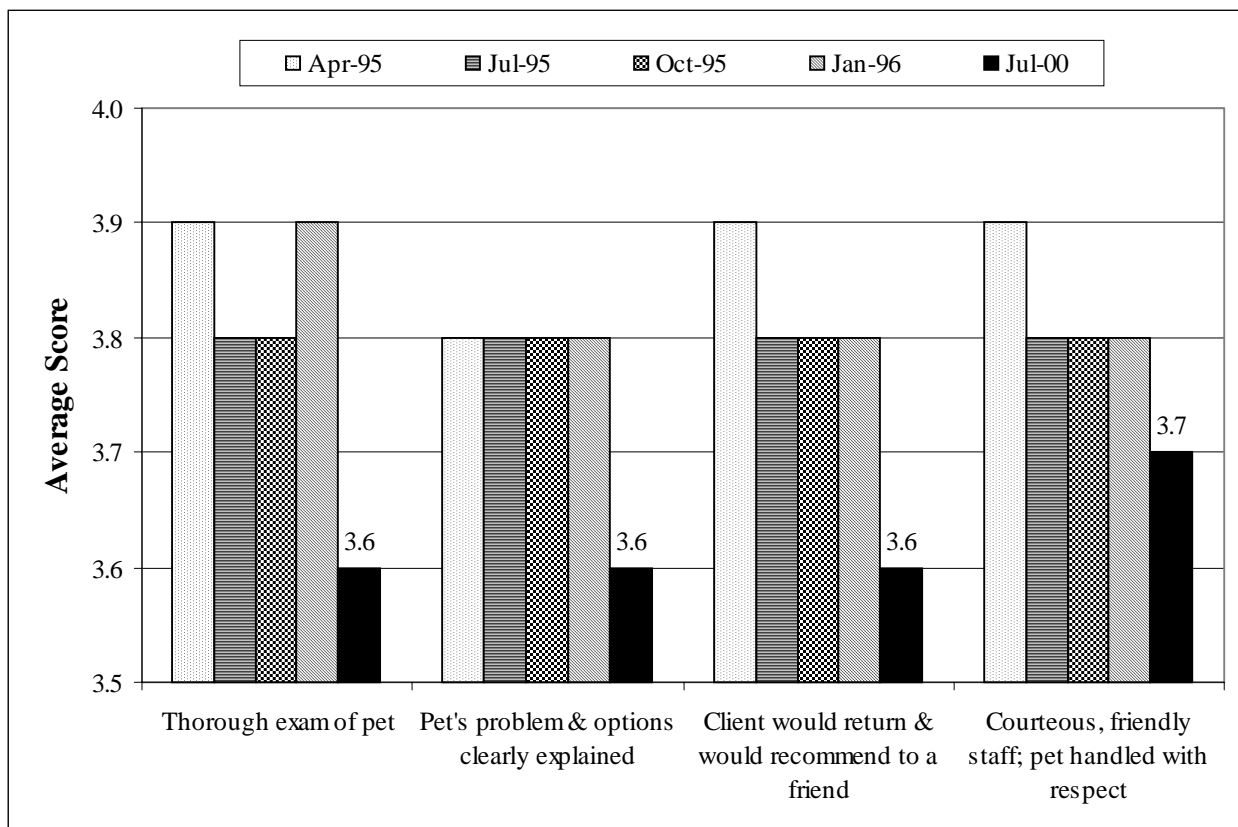


Figure 7. The most highly regarded aspects of our clients' visit to the VTH - comparison of current survey results with previous exit surveys conducted in 1995 and 1996.

When clients were asked an open-ended question about which two things they liked most about their last VTH visit, the most frequent responses included:

- ★ Staff attitude and caring (36.5%)
- ★ Care of their pet (18.5%)

- ★ Students' attitude and helpfulness (17.7%)
- ★ Thorough explanation/answered clients' questions (13.3%)
- ★ Knowledge and expertise of staff (10.5%)

We must strive to maintain quality in these areas while, at the same time, improving quality in areas that were not as highly regarded by clients.

The following areas are candidates for improvement, as greater than 10 % of clients were not satisfied with the item in question:

- ❖ 14% of the clients disagreed or strongly disagreed that the time spent at the hospital was not excessively long (3.2).**
- ❖ 14% of the clients did not feel that the fee system was clearly explained to them and that an estimate of total costs was given prior to treatment (3.3).
- ❖ 11.8% of the clients did not feel they were seen by a senior veterinary student or a veterinarian in a timely manner, consistent with their appointment time (3.3).
- ❖ 10.4% of the clients were not able to find a parking spot without difficulty (3.3).

** Numbers in parentheses following a statement indicate the overall satisfaction score among those surveyed.

Additionally, greater than 7% of clients were not satisfied with the following aspects of their VTH experience:

- ❖ 8.4% of the clients did not agree that the hours of the VTH are convenient (3.3).
- ❖ 8.3% of the clients did not agree that they had paid a fair price for services provided to their pet (3.2).
- ❖ 7.5% of the clients disagreed or strongly disagreed with being able to reach the appointment desk by the phone without difficulty (3.3).

- ❖ 7.0% of the clients disagreed or strongly disagreed with being able to find the VTH without difficulty (3.3).

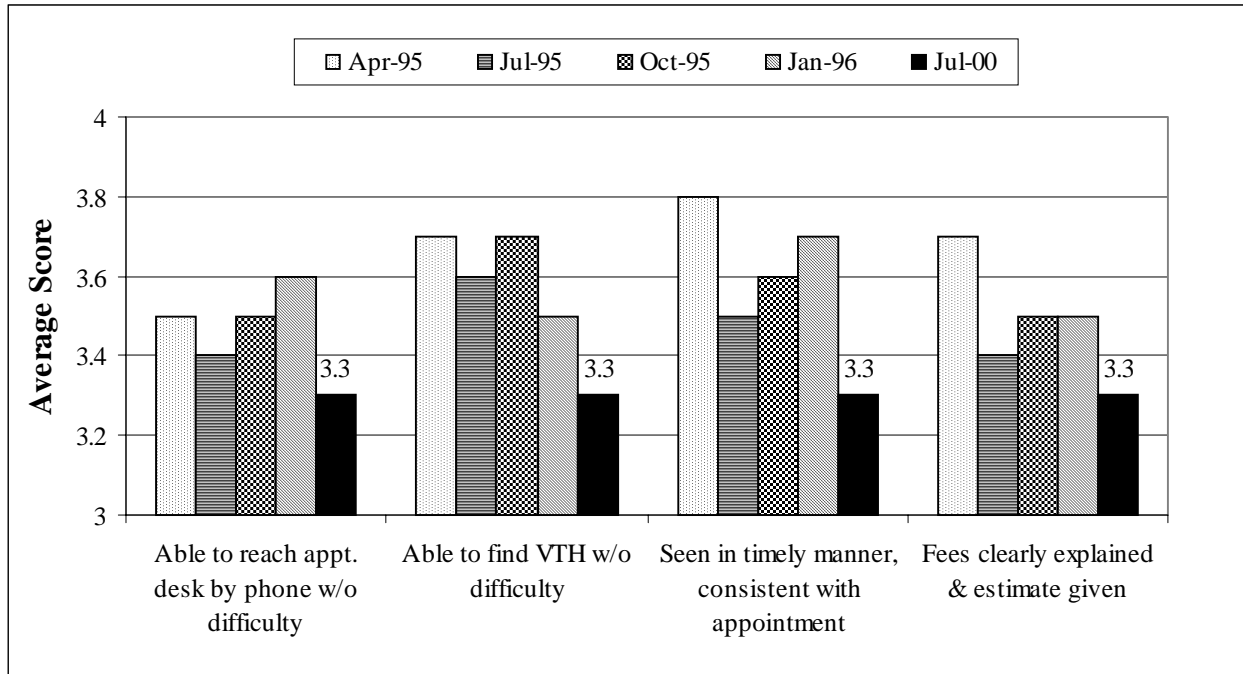


Figure 8. The lowest rated aspects of our clients' visit to the VTH - comparison of current survey results with previous exit surveys conducted in 1995 and 1996.

Results for the lowest rated aspects of our clients' visit to the VTH are presented in Figure 8. The following items were not assessed in previous surveys, so there is no basis of comparison: "convenient VTH hours", "ability to find parking", "time spent at the VTH was not too long", and "paid a fair price for services received".

Because MSU-VTH is a teaching hospital, there is an expectation that the workup on a patient will take longer than in a private practice. While this extra time is necessary to provide a valuable learning experience for students, we also need to keep the client in mind. Minimizing the time it takes to workup a case, while still providing a learning experience for students, may increase client satisfaction in this area.

An analysis was performed, comparing income level and response to “fair price was paid for services provided”. Of the clients who either disagreed or strongly disagreed with “a fair price was paid for services provided”: 46% had an annual income of \$75,000 or higher; 33% had an annual income between \$25,000 and \$75,000; and 21% had an annual income less than or equal to \$25,000. Surprisingly, almost 80% of those who felt they did not pay a fair price for services provided had an annual income of greater than \$25,000. While clients with either an annual household income of greater than \$75,000 or less than \$25,000 appear to be over-represented among those wishing to lower costs (see Figure 1), a Chi-squared analysis indicates that these differences are not statistically significant. Further research could be done to determine if there were specific services that clients felt were overpriced.

When clients were asked an open-ended question about changes they would like to see, the most frequent responses included:

- ❖ lowering the cost of services (11.0%)
- ❖ having satellite offices (10.2%)
- ❖ reducing the waiting time (9.9%)
- ❖ providing more parking (6.1%)
- ❖ extending business hours to include weekends (5.0%)

Of those clients stating that they wished to lower costs, the mean price paid when they visited the MSU-VTH was \$866.50. However, 50% of these 36 clients had bills totaling less than \$500. While lowering the cost of services was the most frequent response cited by clients, a widely accepted business principle in the service industries, commonly attributed to Peter Drucker, indicates that if at least 20% of your customers are not complaining about their costs, then your prices may be too low. From this point of view, it appears that the VTH should be able

to continue to implement reasonable annual price increases (as deemed necessary) without great concern for negative impacts on caseload.

Fifteen percent (15%) of clients whose annual income level was less than \$10,000 had declined a recommended treatment because the cost was too high compared to 20% of clients whose annual income level was more than \$100,000. Four percent (4%) of clients whose annual income level was less than \$10,000 had an animal euthanized because the cost of treatment was too high compared to 10% of clients whose annual income level was more than \$100,000. This illustrates the fact that a client's annual income does not necessarily correlate to how much they are willing to spend on their pet.

Greater than 49% of respondents listed the following items in their top five factors to consider when choosing a primary-care veterinarian:

- Veterinarian is kind and gentle
- Reputation of veterinarian for high quality care
- Veterinarian is respectful and informative
- How soon an appointment can be scheduled
- Range of services offered by veterinarian

Price as a choice factor ranked 7 out of 10 in terms of importance when choosing a primary-care veterinarian. Given this information, a kind, respectful veterinarian with a reputation for high-quality care should be able to increase his/her prices with minimal loss of clients.

Summary

In conclusion, overall client satisfaction with the MSU-VTH is quite high, but may be decreasing slightly compared to results from 1995 and 1996 surveys. The most valued areas of the VTH according to small animal clients include:

- ★ Courteous and friendly students/veterinarians who handled the client's pet with care and respect
- ★ Thoroughness of medical staff in obtaining information about and examining the client's pet
- ★ Explaining the pet's problem and treatment options to the client in understandable language

Our greatest opportunities for improvement include:

- ❖ Decreasing the time a client spends at the hospital
- ❖ Clearly explaining the fee system to clients and providing an estimate of total costs prior to treatment
- ❖ Seeing clients in a timely manner, consistent with their appointment time
- ❖ Less difficulty obtaining a parking spot

Concentrating on these areas will enable MSU-VTH to remain at the forefront of the veterinary profession by not only providing quality medicine, but outstanding customer service as well.

Appendix A

July 27, 2000

Dear Client of the MSU Veterinary Teaching Hospital:

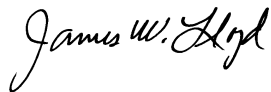
Michigan State University is conducting a survey of clients regarding their experiences with the Veterinary Teaching Hospital. The purpose of this survey is to learn how well we are serving the community, and to identify areas for improvement.

Your input is essential as we begin to outline future goals and objectives for the Veterinary Teaching Hospital. Your responses will remain anonymous, and will be held in strictest confidence. We ask that you take approximately 15 minutes to fill out the enclosed questionnaire and return it in the envelope provided by Wednesday, August 9th.

If you have questions or comments, please feel free to contact me at (517) 353-9559 or lloydj@cvm.msu.edu.

Thank you in advance for your assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "James W. Lloyd".

James W. Lloyd, DVM, PhD

Appendix A

MSU VETERINARY TEACHING HOSPITAL, SMALL ANIMAL SERVICE CLIENT SURVEY

1. When was your most recent visit to the Michigan State University Veterinary Teaching Hospital?

- ☐ Last week
- ☐ Last month
- ☐ 2 – 5 months ago
- ☐ 6 – 12 months ago

2. Number of animals currently in your household:

_____ dogs	_____ horses
_____ cats	_____ birds
_____ reptiles and amphibians	_____ other small mammals (e.g. rabbits, ferrets)

3. How many times have you used the MSU Veterinary Teaching Hospital in the last 2 years?

_____ times

PLEASE ANSWER THE FOLLOWING FOR YOUR MOST RECENT VISIT TO THE SMALL ANIMAL HOSPITAL:

4. What species of animal was the patient at your most recent visit? (please check one)

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dog | <input type="checkbox"/> Reptile or amphibian |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cat | <input type="checkbox"/> Bird |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other small mammal | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |

5. Who was the primary MSU veterinarian to treat your pet? _____

6. What was your main reason for choosing the MSU Veterinary Teaching Hospital? (please check only one)

- ☐ The MSU Hospital is my primary veterinarian
- ☐ My primary veterinarian referred me
- ☐ A friend or family member who is not a veterinarian recommended the MSU Hospital
- ☐ Other: _____

7. What service(s) did you use? (please check all that apply)

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Annual exam | <input type="checkbox"/> Emergency | <input type="checkbox"/> Non-emergency illness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cancer diagnosis/treatment | <input type="checkbox"/> Euthanasia | <input type="checkbox"/> Ophthalmology |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cardiology | <input type="checkbox"/> Hospitalization | <input type="checkbox"/> Reproductive evaluation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dentistry | <input type="checkbox"/> Laboratory tests | <input type="checkbox"/> Second opinion |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dermatology | <input type="checkbox"/> Neurology | <input type="checkbox"/> Vaccinations |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Surgery (please check one): _____ Spay/neuter _____ Orthopedic _____ Other | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> X-rays, ultrasound, CT scan or other imaging | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ | | |

8. What was the total cost of service(s) for your most recent visit to the Veterinary Teaching Hospital?

\$ _____

Appendix A

Please rate the following aspects of your most recent experience at the MSU VTH:

SA=Strongly agree, A=Agree, D=Disagree,
SD=Strongly disagree, N/A=Does not apply to my visit

CIRCLE ONE

9. I was able to reach the appointment desk by phone without difficulty	SA	A	D	SD	N/A
10. I was treated courteously on the phone	SA	A	D	SD	N/A
11. The phone staff answered my questions satisfactorily	SA	A	D	SD	N/A
12. I was able to find the Veterinary Teaching Hospital without difficulty	SA	A	D	SD	N/A
13. The hours of the Veterinary Teaching Hospital are convenient	SA	A	D	SD	N/A
14. I was able to find a parking spot without difficulty	SA	A	D	SD	N/A
15. The waiting area was clean and comfortable	SA	A	D	SD	N/A
16. I was seen by a senior veterinary student or a veterinarian in a timely manner, consistent with my appointment time	SA	A	D	SD	N/A
17. The medical staff was thorough in examining my pet and obtaining information about its condition	SA	A	D	SD	N/A
18. The veterinary student who saw my pet was courteous and friendly	SA	A	D	SD	N/A
19. The veterinarian who saw my pet was courteous and friendly	SA	A	D	SD	N/A
20. My pet was handled with care and respect	SA	A	D	SD	N/A
21. My pet's problems were explained to me in language that I could understand	SA	A	D	SD	N/A
22. Treatment options for my pet were clearly explained to me	SA	A	D	SD	N/A
23. (If your pet was hospitalized:) Reports on my pet's medical progress were provided to me in a timely manner	SA	A	D	SD	N/A
24. I was given clear discharge ("go-home") instructions	SA	A	D	SD	N/A
25. The amount of time I spent at the hospital was not excessively long	SA	A	D	SD	N/A
26. The fee system was clearly explained to me and I was given an estimate of total costs prior to treatment	SA	A	D	SD	N/A
27. (If your pet was hospitalized) Cost estimates were revised and explained to me in a clear and timely manner	SA	A	D	SD	N/A
28. I paid a fair price for the services provided to my pet	SA	A	D	SD	N/A
29. I would return to the Veterinary Teaching Hospital with a pet	SA	A	D	SD	N/A
30. I would recommend the Veterinary Teaching Hospital to friends	SA	A	D	SD	N/A

Appendix A

31. What are the two things you liked most about your last visit to the Veterinary Teaching Hospital?

32. If you could change two things about the Veterinary Teaching Hospital, what would they be?

33. What factors are most important to you when choosing a primary-care veterinarian? Please RANK your top 5 answers in order of importance, with 1 being the most important factor, and 5 the least important:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Convenient hours of operation | <input type="checkbox"/> Range of services offered by veterinarian |
| <input type="checkbox"/> How long the appointment will take | <input type="checkbox"/> Recommendation from a friend or relative |
| <input type="checkbox"/> How soon an appointment can be scheduled | <input type="checkbox"/> Reputation of veterinarian for high quality care |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Location of clinic | <input type="checkbox"/> Veterinarian is kind and gentle |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Price of services | <input type="checkbox"/> Veterinarian is respectful and informative |

34. Have you ever declined a treatment recommended by a veterinarian because the cost of the treatment was too high?

☐ Yes ☐ No

35. Have you ever had an animal euthanized ("put to sleep") because the cost of treatment was too high?

☐ Yes ☐ No

36. Your gender: ☐ F ☐ M

37. Your age: ☐ Under 25 ☐ 35 – 50
☐ 25 – 35 ☐ Over 50

38. Your marital status: ☐ Single/divorced/widowed ☐ Married

39. Number of children under 18 living with you: _____

40. Your annual income: ☐ Less than \$10,000 ☐ \$50,000 – \$75,000
☐ \$10,000 – \$25,000 ☐ \$75,000 – \$100,000
☐ \$25,000 – \$50,000 ☐ More than \$100,000

41. Your name (optional): _____

Thank you for your help. Your answers will help us to provide you and your pets with the best veterinary services possible.

Please return the survey in the envelope provided by Wednesday, August 9th. If you have questions or comments, please feel free to contact Dr. Jim Lloyd at (517) 353-9559 or lloydj@cvm.msu.edu.