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# ***Staff Paper***

**Equine 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 2001-34**

**August , 2001**



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## **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 equine 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 equine 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 leading equine practitioners. 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 to assess customer satisfaction. Based on this list, the equine client questionnaire was developed in June 2000 by CVM staff (see Appendix A).

### ***Sample Selection***

Five hundred (500) equine 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. Four hundred ninety-three (493) of the 500 selected were deliverable. This number represents 26% of all equine 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 183 of the 493 equine clients surveyed, for a response rate of 37%. Of those that responded, 57% did so only after receiving the reminder post card.

### ***Client Information***

Greater than three-fourths of survey respondents were female (77.5%), while less than one-fourth were male (22.5%). Clients aged 35-50 years were the most frequent respondents to our survey (52%), followed by clients greater than 50 years old (30%). Clients 35 years and older accounted for 82% of survey respondents. Clients 25-35 years old comprised 13% of respondents with the least frequent respondents being those less than 25 years old (4%). Greater than three-fourths of clients were married (77%); 21% listed themselves as single, 1% were divorced, and 1% were widowed. Fifty-eight percent (58%) of clients had no children under the age of 18 living with them.

The majority of equine clients (87.7%) had an annual household income of \$25,000 or greater, with 63.6% of clients having an annual household income of more than \$50,000; 52.5% of clients had an annual household income between \$25,000 and \$75,000. Only 12.4% of clients had an annual household income of less than \$25,000 including 3.1% with an annual household income of less than \$10,000. Figure 1 summarizes these data.

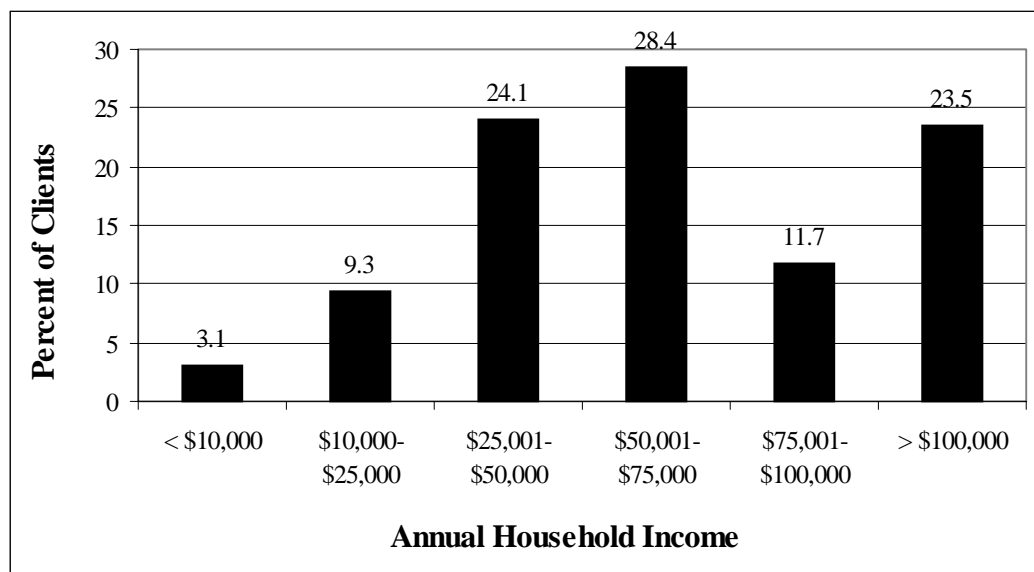


Figure 1. Equine client household income distribution (based on 162 client responses)

## *Descriptive Statistics*

Table 1 below depicts the most recent visit by responding equine clients to the MSU-VTH within the 1999-2000 fiscal year. Eighty-six percent (86%) of clients had their most recent visit to the VTH more than two months prior to the survey date, with 53% occurring greater than six months previously. Less than 13% had visited the VTH within the preceding month.

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

<b>Most recent visit</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Last week	4	2.2
Last month	19	10.4
2 to 5 months	61	33.3
6 to 12 months	97	53.0

The number of animals, broken down by species, owned by equine 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

<b>Species of Animal</b>	<b>Total # in survey population</b>	<b>Minimum # per household</b>	<b>Maximum # per household</b>	<b>Mean # per household</b>
Dogs	388	0	25	2.1
Cats	449	0	25	2.5
Horses	1138	0	50	6.2
Other small mammals (e.g. rabbits, ferrets)	67	0	9	0.4
Birds	109	0	30	0.6
Reptiles and Amphibians	84	0	30	0.5

Of the 2,235 total animals represented, horses were the most common, with a mean of 6.2 horses per household. Cats came in second place with a mean of 2.5 per household, followed by dogs, with 2.1 per household. Other small mammals were the least common pet in our survey population. Only 4.4% of equine clients owned a single animal, with most (> 95%) owning multiple animals of the same or different species. Only one client reported that they did not own

any animals at the time of the survey. Equine clients owned a mean of 12.2 animals per household. Figure 2 provides an overview of the number of animals per household.

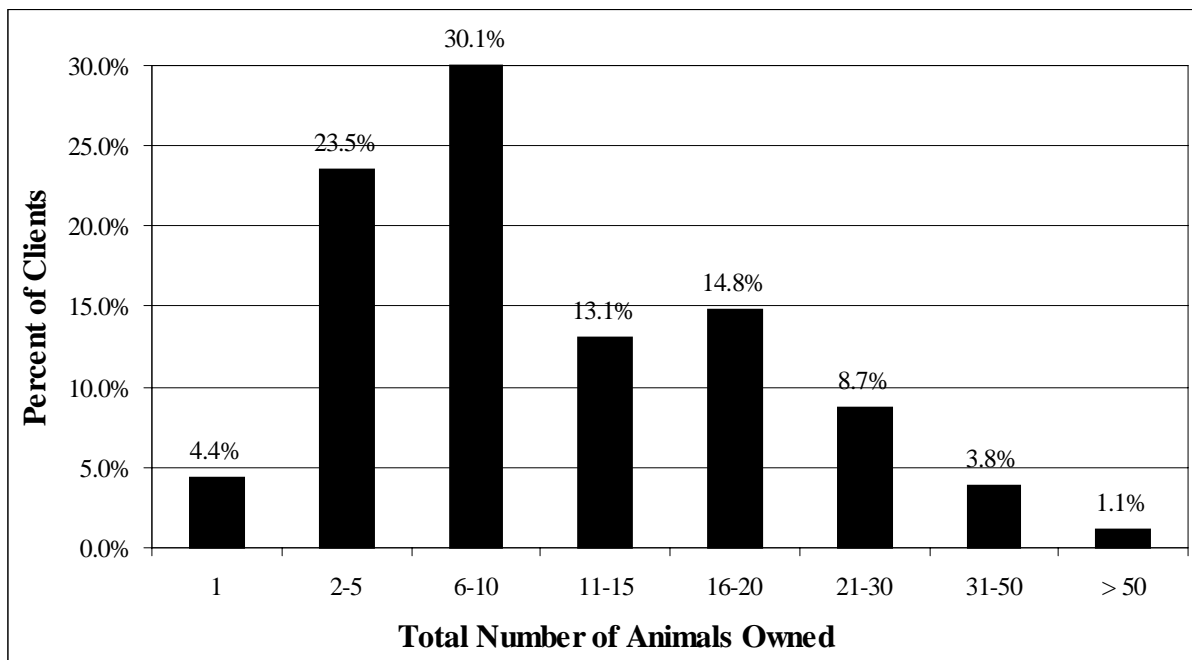


Figure 2. Total number of animals per household, regardless of species.

When asked how many times they had visited the MSU-VTH in the past two years, the mean number of visits was 2.03 (median = 1, standard deviation = 1.94).

### ***Client responses***

The client responses reported below are based on the clients' most recent visit to the MSU equine service.

Clients were asked to provide the name of the primary MSU veterinarian who treated their horse. One hundred fourteen (114) usable responses were obtained and are summarized in Table 3. Some respondents provided more than one veterinarian's name. The veterinarians seen most frequently by clients were Drs. Nickels, Stick, Cornelisse, Peroni, and Schott.



Table 3. Primary MSU veterinarian seen by equine clients on their most recent visit.

<b>Clinician</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Clinician</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Nickels, Frank	29	25.4	Byron, Christopher	5	4.4
Stick, John	17	14.9	Holcombe, Sue	4	3.5
Cornelisse, Cornelius	15	13.2	Ramsey, David	4	3.5
Peroni, John	12	10.5	Lugo, Joel	3	2.6
Schott, Hal	10	8.8	Cassotis, Nick	2	1.8
Caron, John	9	7.9	Jackson, William	2	1.8
Carr, Elizabeth	7	6.1	Carleton, Carla	1	0.9
Marteniuk, Judy	5	4.4	Other	1	0.9

The majority of the respondents (75.4%) chose the MSU-VTH because their primary veterinarian referred them. A much smaller number used the services at the VTH because it was recommended by a friend or family member (10.9%) or because they have used the VTH for a long time (7.1%). Only one respondent used the VTH because it was their primary veterinarian.

Table 4 summarizes these data.

Table 4. Reasons why clients chose MSU-VTH to care for their horse.

<b>Reason</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Primary veterinarian referral	138	75.4
Recommendation by a friend or family member	20	10.9
MSU hospital is primary veterinarian	1	0.5
Other:		
Have used VTH for a long time	13	7.1
Own veterinarian could not diagnose	3	1.6
Lameness exam	3	1.6
VTH reputation	3	1.6
Use for intensive/surgical procedures	3	1.6
Only option for colic cases	2	1.1

The most frequent services used by clients included surgery/lameness (51.4%), hospitalization (50.8%), emergency (45.9%), and x-rays and other imaging (43.7%). Table 5 summarizes these data. Other services not specifically listed were used 8.2% of the time.

Table 5. Services used by MSU-VTH clients.

Service	Frequency	%	Service	Frequency	%
Surgery/lameness	94	51.4	Other illness	24	13.1
Hospitalization	93	50.8	Second opinion	20	10.9
Emergency	84	45.9	Pre-purchase exam	6	3.3
X-rays/scintigraphy/ other imaging	80	43.7	Reproductive evaluation	4	2.2
Colic	42	23.0	Other	15	8.2

Overall, the cost of the most recent visit to the MSU-VTH, based on client recall, ranged from \$9 to \$12,000 with a mean cost of \$1,143.81. Approximately 7% of clients spent \$3100 or more and 7% spent \$100 or less on services. Figure 3 displays these data.

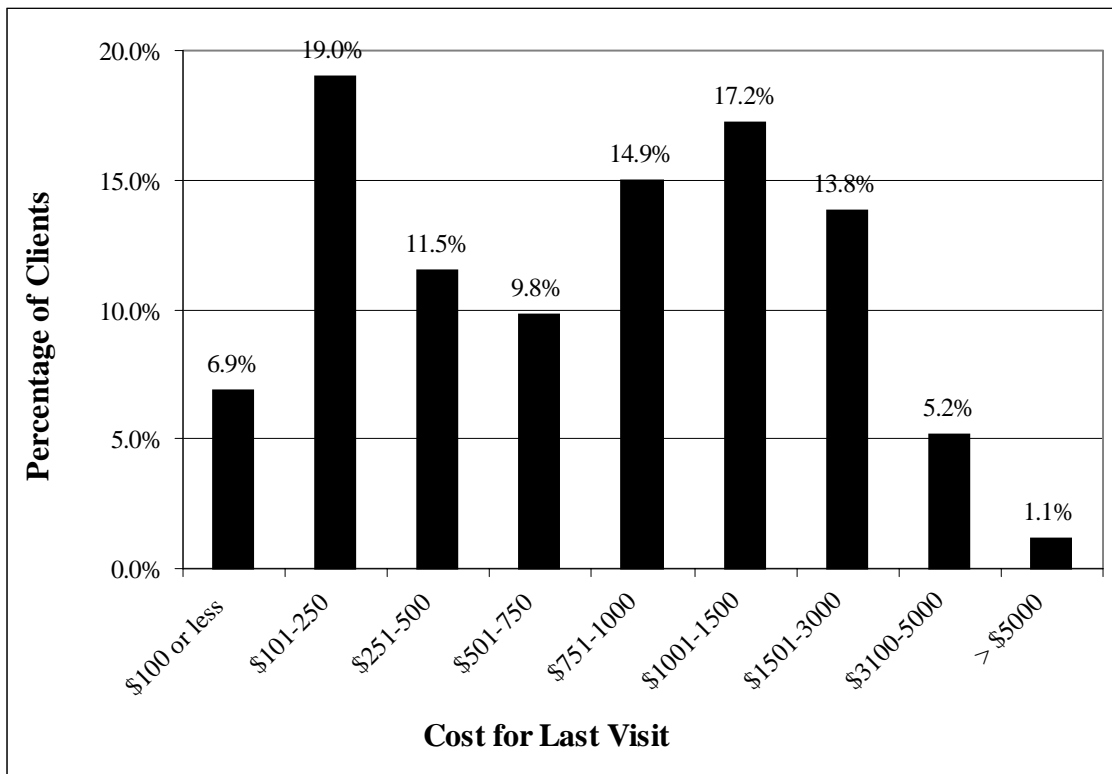


Figure 3. Distribution of total cost of services (based on client recall) for the most recent visit to the MSU-VTH.

Clients were asked to rate various aspects of their most recent experience at the MSU-VTH. These data are summarized in Table 6.

Table 6. Clients' level of agreement with various aspects of the VTH experience

Aspect of MSU-VTH most recent experience:*	N	Percentage of Clients			
		SA	A	D	SD
<b><i>Customer Service</i></b>					
Able to reach the appointment desk by phone without difficulty	164	44.5	51.8	3.7	0
Treated courteously on the phone	175	56.6	41.7	1.1	0.6
Phone staff answered questions satisfactorily	169	43.8	49.7	4.1	2.4
Able to find the Veterinary Teaching Hospital without difficulty	177	44.6	47.5	6.8	1.1
The hours of the Veterinary Teaching Hospital are convenient	174	41.4	53.4	4.6	0.6
Access for horse trailer was adequate	182	48.4	47.3	3.3	1.1
<b><i>Patient Care</i></b>					
Seen by a senior veterinary student or veterinarian in a timely manner	172	56.4	37.2	5.2	1.2
Medical staff was thorough in examining horse and obtaining information about its condition	179	61.5	35.8	1.7	1.1
The veterinary student who saw the horse was courteous and friendly	174	62.1	37.9	0	0
The veterinarian who saw the horse was courteous and friendly	181	68.0	29.8	1.7	0.6
Client's horse was handled with care and respect	182	68.1	30.8	0.5	0.5
Horse's problems were explained in understandable language	179	64.2	34.1	1.1	0.6
Treatment options for horse were clearly explained	175	57.7	38.9	2.3	1.1
(If horse was hospitalized:) Reports on horse's medical progress were provided in a timely manner	123	45.5	43.1	7.3	4.1
Clear discharge instructions were given	170	49.4	45.9	3.5	1.2
The total time for visit was not excessively long	170	38.8	51.2	7.6	2.4
<b><i>Fees for Services Provided</i></b>					
The fee system was clearly explained and an estimate of total costs was given prior to treatment	175	45.1	45.7	5.7	3.4
(If horse was hospitalized:) Cost estimates were revised and explained in a clear and timely manner	121	43.0	46.3	9.1	1.7
A fair price for services provided to horse was paid	177	39.5	46.3	7.9	6.2
<b><i>Overall Satisfaction with the MSU-VTH</i></b>					
Would return to the Veterinary Teaching Hospital with a horse	175	66.3	28.0	1.1	4.6
Would recommend the Veterinary Teaching Hospital to friends	176	66.5	27.3	2.3	4.0

\*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 horse was courteous and friendly (100.0%)
- ✓ my horse was handled with care and respect (98.9%)
- ✓ my horse's problems were explained to me in language that I could understand (98.3%)
- ✓ I was treated courteously on the phone (98.3%)
- ✓ the veterinarian who saw my horse was courteous and friendly (97.8%)
- ✓ medical staff was thorough in examining my horse and obtaining information about its condition (97.3%)
- ✓ treatment options for my horse were clearly explained to me (96.6%)
- ✓ I was able to reach the appointment desk by phone without difficulty (96.3%)
- ✓ access for my horse trailer was adequate (95.7%)
- ✓ I was given clear discharge ("go-home") instructions (95.3%)

When asked an open-ended question about which two things clients liked most about their last visit to the VTH, 148 responses were received. Clients' responses are listed in Table 7 in order of decreasing frequency of response. "Courteous/caring staff" was the most frequently cited response (31.7%), followed by "knowledge/education of staff" (15.8%), "promptness/quick in-and-out (15.8%), "treatment/care of horse" (14.2%), and "thorough explanation/answered questions well" (13.7%). Kudos to Drs. Nickels and Peroni who were specifically mentioned as one of the things clients liked most about their last visit to the VTH.

Table 7. Aspects that clients liked most about their last visit to the VTH

<b>Comment by client</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%*</b>	<b>Comment by client</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%*</b>
Courteous/caring staff	58	31.7	Students and staff helpful	6	3.3
Knowledge/education of staff	29	15.8	Able to visit horse when wanted/be with during treatment	5	2.7
Promptness/quick in-and-out	29	15.8	Facilities clean (stall, barn)	5	2.7
Treatment/care of horse	26	14.2	Helpful vet students	5	2.7
Thorough explanation/ answered questions well	25	13.7	Hospital easy to use and access	5	2.7
Communication of staff with owner/updates	14	7.7	Up-to-date equipment and staff	4	2.2
Professionalism	14	7.7	Diagnosed problem	3	1.6
Thorough exam	12	6.6	Dr. Peroni	3	1.6
Surgery success/horse recovered	11	6.0	Comfortable leaving animal there	2	1.1
Confidence in staff	8	4.4	Dr. Nickels	2	1.1
Vet student's knowledge	6	3.3	Technician's knowledge and help	2	1.1
Respect for owner/ treated well	6	3.3	Relieved / minimized my stress	2	1.1
Hours (open 24 hours)	6	3.3	Good service	2	1.1
Fees reasonable	6	3.3			

\* Percent is based on 183 total surveys returned.

From Table 6, clients were most dissatisfied (either disagreed or strongly disagreed) with the following aspects of their MSU-VTH experience:

- paid a fair price for the services provided to my horse (14.1%)
- if horse was hospitalized, reports on the horse's medical progress were provided to me in a timely manner (11.4%)
- If horse was hospitalized, cost estimates were revised and explained to me in a clear and timely manner (10.7%)
- the total time for my visit was not excessively long (10.0%)
- fee system was clearly explained to me and I was given an estimate of total costs prior to treatment (9.1%)

Only 5.7% of clients would not return to the MSU-VTH with a horse for treatment and 6.3% 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 56% 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 attitude toward the total time required for the most recent visit. As it turns out, the top 20% were more inclined to agree that the total time required for the most recent visit was not excessively long.

To further investigate attitudes toward price, an analysis was performed comparing “income level” and response to “fair price was paid for services provided.” Overall, 83.3% of responding clients who provided their annual household income felt they paid a fair price for services provided, while 14.8% did not think they paid a fair price. Among the respondents who felt they did not pay a fair price for services:

- 0% had an annual income less than \$10,000
- 8.3% had an annual income between \$10,000 and \$25,000
- 50.0% had an annual income between \$25,000 and \$50,000
- 33.4% had an annual income between \$50,000 and \$100,000
- 8.3% had an annual income greater than \$100,000

A Fisher’s exact 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, 97 responses were received. Clients’ responses are listed in Table 8. The most frequently cited changes that clients would like to make included lowering the cost of services (14.2%), having satellite offices (9.8%), and reducing the waiting time (4.9%).

Table 8. VTH aspects that clients would change

<b>Comment by client</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%*</b>	<b>Comment by client</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%*</b>
Costs too much	26	14.2	Misdiagnosis	3	1.6
Too far away	18	9.8	Not enough parking	3	1.6
Wait was too long	9	4.9	Better explanation of procedure risks/success	3	1.6
Owner not updated on horse’s status	7	3.8	Improve accessibility for trailers	2	1.1
Inconvenient hours – need to extend	7	3.8	Send report to referring veterinarian	2	1.1
Difficulty contacting Dr. by phone	7	3.8	Separate stalls so animals don’t touch	2	1.1
Difficult to find VTH	6	3.3	Discharge time too long	2	1.1
No payment plan	5	2.7	Need full-time farrier	2	1.1
Poor client /vet communication	4	2.2	Need full fencing around parking lot so horse can’t escape	2	1.1
No exercise area for lameness exams	4	2.2	Make services free	1	0.5
Make lounge area more comfortable	3	1.6	Reduced fees for DVM alumni	1	0.5
Improve staff answering the phone	3	1.6			

\* Percent is based on 183 total surveys returned.

All of the 26 clients who wished to lower costs provided information on the cost of their most recent visit to the MSU-VTH. The clients’ bills ranged from \$9 - \$7,997.27 with a mean cost of \$1,459.66. See Figure 4 for the distribution.

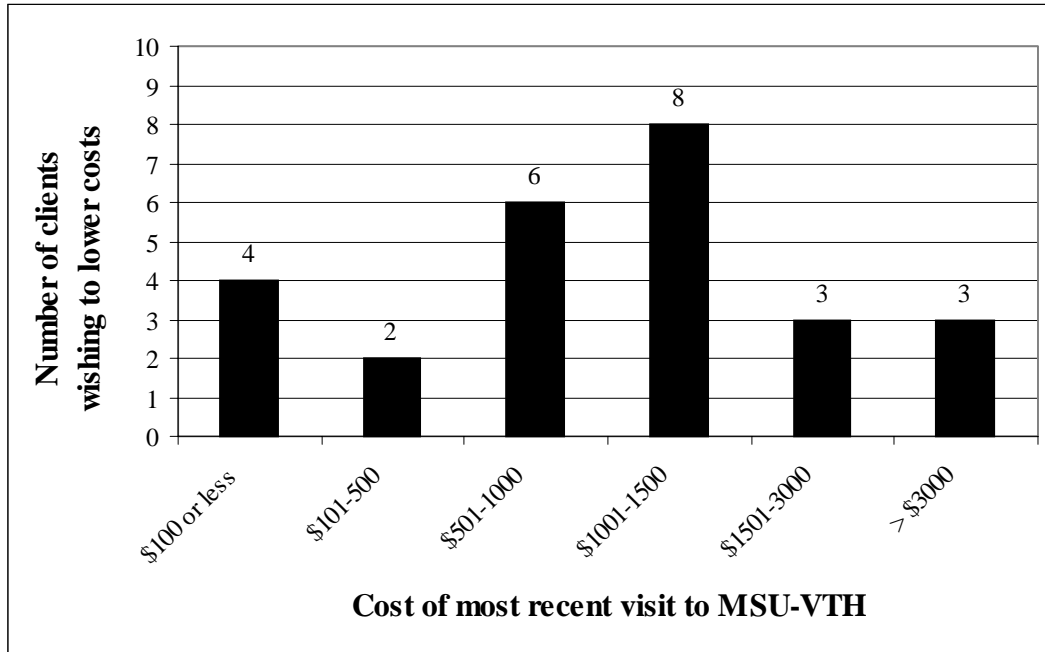


Figure 4. Clients' costs on the most recent visit to the MSU-VTH for those clients who wished to lower the cost of services.

Twenty-one of the 26 clients who wished to lower costs provided information on their annual household income. These data are summarized in Figure 5.

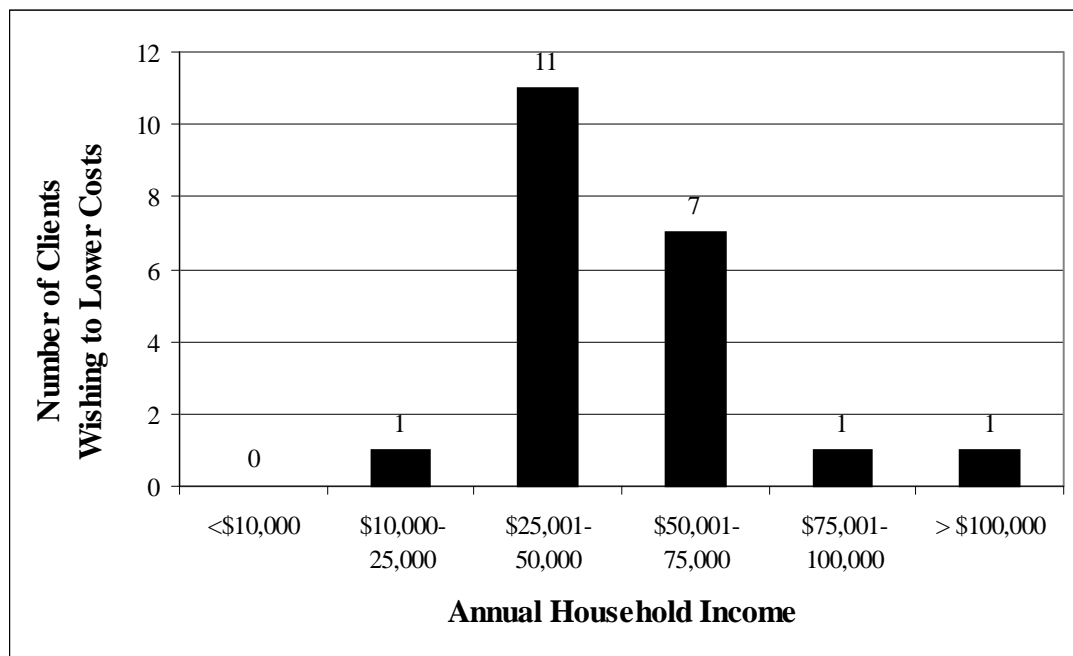


Figure 5. Annual household income distribution for clients who wished to lower the cost of services



Clients ranked the factors in Table 9 according to what that they felt were the most important when choosing a primary-care veterinarian. “Reputation of the veterinarian for high-quality care” (54.6%), “a respectful and informative veterinarian” (17.5%), and “how soon an appointment can be scheduled” (11.5%) ranked among the top three. Overall, price as a choice factor ranked 8<sup>th</sup> in terms of importance, although slightly more than half (52.0%) of the respondents listed “price of services” among their top five considerations for choosing a primary-care veterinarian. “How long the appointment will take” and “recommendation from a friend or relative” tied for last place, with only 0.5% of respondents choosing each as their primary consideration for choosing a veterinarian.

Table 9. Most important factors when choosing a primary care veterinarian

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Ranked as #1</b>	<b>Ranked in top 5</b>
Reputation of veterinarian for high-quality care	54.6%	81.4%
Veterinarian is respectful and informative	17.5%	81.4%
How soon an appointment can be scheduled	11.5%	62.3%
Veterinarian is kind and gentle	10.4%	58.5%
Range of services offered by veterinarian	10.4%	66.7%
Location of clinic	4.4%	33.3%
Convenient hours of operation	4.4%	32.8%
Price of services	3.3%	52.0%
Recommendation from a friend or relative	0.5%	19.1%
How long the appointment will take	0.5%	10.9%

When clients were asked if they had declined treatment recommended by the veterinarian because the cost was too high, 30.8% (56 out of 182 respondents) said they had, while 69.2% had not. Fifteen and one-half percent (15.5%) 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:

- ❖ 1.9% of clients whose income level was less than \$10,000 had declined a recommended treatment because the cost was too high compared to 13.2% of clients whose income level was more than \$100,000.
- ❖ 4.0% of clients whose income level was less than \$10,000 had an animal euthanized because the cost of treatment was too high compared to 8.0% of clients whose income level was more than \$100,000.

### **Discussion**

Roughly one-third (183) of the 493 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 household income of \$25,000 or greater.

Varying degrees of recall bias may be present in our survey results, due to the fact that 86% of those surveyed had visited the VTH more than two months prior to the survey date. Of this 86%, 53% had visited the VTH more than six months previously. For example, only 114 out of 183 clients surveyed provided the name of the primary MSU veterinarian who saw their horse. Some respondents indicated that they could not remember or simply left this question blank. Among those who provided a response, Drs. Nickels, Stick, Cornelisse, Peroni, and Schott were the most frequently seen veterinarians.

Overall, the cost of the most recent visit to the MSU-VTH ranged from \$9 to \$12,000, with a mean cost of \$1,144. In fact, VTH business records indicate that the mean charge per equine case during the 1999-2000 fiscal year was about \$800. 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.

Horses were the most common animals owned by those surveyed, with cats in second place. Only 4.4% of those surveyed owned a single pet with greater than 95% of clients owning multiple animals.

The mean number of visits during the past two years was 2.03 (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 75.4% of all equine clients. In that regard, a survey of over 150 equine veterinarians in Michigan has also been conducted and will be reported separately. The percentage of persons that chose MSU-VTH based on its reputation (1.6%) may have been larger if this were a listed reason from which to choose. Clients that selected this as their main reason for visiting the VTH did so under the "other" category.

The most frequent services used by clients included surgery/lameness (51.4%), hospitalization (50.8%), emergency (45.9%), and x-rays and other imaging (43.7%). The services used least frequently were reproductive evaluation (2.2%), and pre-purchase examination (3.3%). 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.

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 use the

results of this survey as a baseline for comparison to future survey results. In order 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. The mean scores for each area are shown in Table 10.

Table 10. Mean scores for various aspects of the MSU-VTH experience

<b>Aspect of MSU-VTH most recent experience:</b>	<b>Mean Score</b>
<b><i>Customer Service</i></b>	
Able to reach the appointment desk by phone without difficulty	3.4
Treated courteously on the phone	3.5
Phone staff answered questions satisfactorily	3.3
Able to find the Veterinary Teaching Hospital without difficulty	3.4
The hours of the Veterinary Teaching Hospital are convenient	3.4
Access for horse trailer was adequate	3.4
<b><i>Patient Care</i></b>	
Seen by a senior veterinary student or veterinarian in a timely manner	3.5
Medical staff was thorough in examining horse and obtaining information about its condition	3.6
The veterinary student who saw the horse was courteous and friendly	3.6
The veterinarian who saw the horse was courteous and friendly	3.7
Clients' horse was handled with care and respect	3.7
Horse's problems were explained in understandable language	3.6
Treatment options for horse were clearly explained	3.5
(If horse was hospitalized:) Reports on horse's medical progress were provided in a timely manner	3.3
Clear discharge instructions were given	3.4
The total time for visit was not excessively long	3.3
<b><i>Fees for Services Provided</i></b>	
The fee system was clearly explained and an estimate of total costs was given prior to treatment	3.3
(If horse was hospitalized:) Cost estimates were revised and explained in a clear and timely manner	3.2
A fair price for services provided to horse was paid	3.3
<b><i>Overall Satisfaction with the MSU-VTH</i></b>	
Would return to the Veterinary Teaching Hospital with a horse	3.6
Would recommend the Veterinary Teaching Hospital to friends	3.6

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

- my horse was handled with care and respect (3.7)\*\*
- the veterinarian who saw my horse was courteous and friendly (3.7)
- the veterinary student who saw my horse was courteous and friendly (3.6)
- medical staff thoroughly examined my horse and obtained information about its condition (3.6)

- my horse's problems were explained to me in language that I could understand (3.6)
- I would return to the VTH with a horse (3.6)
- I would recommend MSU-VTH 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 (3.5)
- I was seen by a senior veterinary student or veterinarian in a timely manner (3.5)
- Treatment options for my horse were clearly explained to me (3.5)

The following areas received the lowest mean scores:

- ❖ If horse was hospitalized: Cost estimates were revised and explained in a clear and timely manner (3.2)\*\*
- ❖ Phone staff answered questions satisfactorily (3.3)
- ❖ If horse was hospitalized: Reports on horse's medical progress were provided in a timely manner (3.3)
- ❖ The total time for visit was not excessively long (3.3)
- ❖ The fee system was clearly explained and an estimate of total costs was given prior to treatment (3.3)
- ❖ I paid a fair price for services provided to my horse (3.3)

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

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”. Recall that 85.8% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed (see Table 6) that they had paid a fair price for services. Of those clients who either disagreed or strongly disagreed with “a fair price was paid for services provided”: 25% had an annual household income of \$75,000 or higher; 67% had an annual household income between \$25,000 and \$75,000; and 8% had an annual household income between \$10,000 and \$25,000. Because this distribution of household income is not significantly different from that of all respondents (see Figure 1), there does not appear to be an association between satisfaction with fees and household income among VTH equine clients.

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 (14.2%)
- ❖ having satellite offices (9.8%)
- ❖ reducing the waiting time (4.9%)

According to Figure 5, clients with an annual household income between \$25,001 and \$50,000 appear to be over-represented while those with an annual household income of <\$10,000 appear under-represented among those wishing to lower costs (see Figure 1).

However, analysis with Fisher’s exact test indicates that these differences are not statistically significant. 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.

Only 1.9% of clients whose annual income level was less than \$10,000 had declined a recommended treatment because the cost was too high compared to 13.2% of clients whose annual income level was more than \$100,000. Four percent (4.0%) 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 8.0% 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 horse.

Greater than 58% of respondents listed the following items in their top five factors to consider when choosing a primary-care veterinarian for their horse:

- Reputation of veterinarian for high quality care (81.4%)
- Veterinarian is respectful and informative (81.4%)
- Range of services offered by veterinarian (66.7%)
- How soon an appointment can be scheduled (62.3%)
- Veterinarian is kind and gentle (58.5%)

Price as a choice factor ranked 8th 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, as evidenced by the fact that 94.3% of clients would return to the VTH with a horse and 93.8% would recommend the VTH to friends. The most valued areas of the VTH according to equine clients included:

- Courteous and friendly veterinarians/students who handled the client's horse with care and respect
- Expertise of the staff
- Thoroughness of medical staff in obtaining information about and examining the client's horse
- Explaining the horse's problems to the client in understandable language

Our greatest opportunities for improvement include:

- ❖ Seeing clients in a timely manner, consistent with their appointment time
- ❖ Clearly explaining the fee system to clients and providing an estimate of total costs prior to treatment
- ❖ Providing reports on a horse's medical progress (for hospitalized animals) to the client in a timely manner
- ❖ Providing revised cost estimates and explanations (for hospitalized animals) to the client in a clear and timely manner

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.

July 27, 2000

Dear Client of the MSU Veterinary Teaching Hospital:

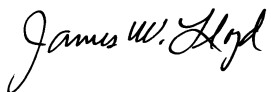
Michigan State University is conducting a survey of clients regarding their experiences with the Veterinary Teaching Hospital. The purpose of this survey is to learn how well we are serving the community, and to identify areas for improvement.

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](mailto: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, EQUINE 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

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PLEASE ANSWER THE FOLLOWING FOR YOUR MOST RECENT VISIT TO THE EQUINE CLINIC:

4. Who was the primary veterinarian at MSU to treat your horse? \_\_\_\_\_

5. 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: \_\_\_\_\_

6. What service(s) did you use? (Please check all that apply)

- Emergency
- Hospitalization
- Colic
- Other illness
- Pre-purchase exam
- Reproductive evaluation
- Second opinion
- Surgery/lameness
- X-rays/scintigraphy/other imaging
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

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

\$ \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

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

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

31. 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       |

32. Have you ever declined a treatment recommended by a veterinarian because the cost of the treatment was too high?  Yes  No

33. Have you ever had an animal euthanized (“put to sleep”) because the cost of treatment was too high?  Yes  No

34. Your gender:  F  M

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

36. Your marital status:  Single/divorced/widowed  Married

37. Number of children under 18 living with you: \_\_\_\_\_

38. 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

39. Your name (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

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

Please return the survey in the envelope provided by August 15. If you have questions or comments, please feel free to contact Dr. Jim Lloyd at (517) 353-9559 or lloydj@cvm.msu.edu.