



How to find social work support for your veterinary practice

Many of you will soon begin your work in community veterinary practices. Congratulations! It is important to develop professional support relationships in the community that can help with clients who have needs beyond what you can or should provide. Developing these relationships before you have the need for them will ensure that you can provide good care to your clients with special needs (and you *will* have them....).

Social workers are a good choice in developing partnerships because they are trained to intervene with a person's *total* environment, not just a person's "mental state." This means that, in addition to providing pet loss counseling, a social worker will know where to go to help one of your clients whose mother needs nursing home care, or how to help a battered woman find a shelter if she wants one. The social worker may also be able to come and provide in-service training for your practice on various topics of interest if you wish.

Social workers do charge fees, but they tend to be a less than psychologists and other mental health professionals. Some social workers save room in their practice for "pro bono" work. Remember though, "you get what you pay for."

So, here is where to begin in developing your support partnerships.

To find a social worker:

- 1) You can go to the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) web site at www.naswdc.org and search for a social worker by clicking on "Resources," "Find a Clinical Social Worker", and entering your state and/or city. You may also choose the specialties of "end of life issues," "crisis intervention," "family issues" and "general practice."
- 2) You can also do a Google search for your State NASW Chapter by typing in your state and then "NASW." This site (for Tennessee it is www.naswtn.com) will give you the local branch nearest you with a contact name. Contact this person and see if she or he knows of any clinical social workers that are "pet friendly"- (i.e. they are sensitive to and are willing to work with people concerned about their companion animals).

- 3) Word of mouth is a great way to find a good social worker. Ask colleagues in practice, friends, neighbors, or people at a place of worship if they can recommend a good social worker who is “pet friendly.” If your practice is located near a college of veterinary medicine, make contact to see what services they have “in-house” or use in the community. I assure you, once the word gets out that you are looking for a partnership with a social worker for a veterinary practice, they will appear. The interest in the social work field for veterinary social work is growing.

You may also want to look into these other resources on your own. A social worker could also help you find these.

- 4) Go to the Yellow Pages and find the number for “Crisis Hotline.” Call the number and tell them you are a veterinarian and wanted to:
 - a) see if this phone line was still in operation,
 - b) see if they are willing to or have spoken with people who are in crisis over their pets,
 - c) ask what other problems they usually provide help for,
 - d) ask them if there are any other phone support services near you,
 - e) ask them for the phone number of the “local mobile crisis unit.”
- 5) Mobile Crisis is a 24-hour service for people who are in crisis, usually offered through a local Community Mental Health Agency. The people who work for mobile crisis are usually social workers. You might call the number you got from the Crisis Hotline for the nearest mobile crisis unit and again,
 - a) tell them you are a veterinarian exploring community resources for people in crisis
 - b) ask them what they deem to be a “crisis” so you know for future reference
 - c) ask them if there are any other community resources they think you should know about in serving the special needs of your clients.
- 6) It is also good to have ready access to phone numbers for the law enforcement agencies nearest you.

As alumni of UTCVM, please feel free to call the VSW Office if you have any questions or need some direction in developing your community partnerships. The phone number is 865-974-8387. We will return your call within 24 hours, or the next business day if on the weekend.

Best wishes, Doctors!