Veterinary Communication Training

INSTITUTE FOR HEALTHCARE COMMUNICATION: BACKGROUND

The Institute for Healthcare Communication (IHC), located in New Haven, Connecticut, is a non-profit organization founded in 1987 which has provided communication training and continuing education to over 160,000 clinicians in human medicine.

IHC—BAYER ANIMAL HEALTH PARTNERSHIP

Since 2002, IHC has expanded the scope of communication training to veterinary medicine through educational grants from Bayer Animal Health. The Bayer Communication Project was developed to address gaps in veterinarian-client communication training at veterinary schools. To address those gaps, this Communication Project has produced 15 educational modules with tools and resources for improving communication skills on a variety of topics (see module descriptions). Teaching communication in veterinary medicine is now endorsed across the profession through national reports such as the Brakke and Mega studies, veterinary curriculum standards as set by AVMA Council of Education, North American Veterinary Licensing Examination testing of client communication skills for licensure, veterinary alumni surveys consistently demonstrating that practice success is dependent upon effective communication skills, and consumer surveys showing that good communication is the number one reason animal owners look for when choosing or staying with a veterinarian. An April 2009 survey of trained faculty reported that the Bayer Communication Project modules have been used in teaching of an estimated 9,000 veterinary students, and 350 veterinary residents and interns. As of 2012, close to 300 faculty at veterinary schools across North America have been trained and IHC has extended training to veterinary technician school faculty as of 2011.

IHC-AVMA PLIT PARTNERSHIP

Since 2007, the AVMA PLIT approved a collaborative agreement with the Institute for Healthcare Communications (IHC) to provide educational information and presentations related to PLIT objectives. The goal is to improve client compliance and satisfaction as well as to reduce the likelihood of a malpractice suit or board complaint. As a result, IHC master trainers have been invited to conduct workshops, provide keynote addresses, and present seminars for practicing veterinarians and teams at international, national, regional, and state veterinary conferences since 2003.

ADDRESSING COMMUNICATION NEEDS OF PRACTICING VETERINARIANS AND TEAMS

In addition to the Bayer Communication Project faculty training in veterinary schools, IHC has provided over 75 invited presentations, workshops and seminars at state, national and international veterinary conferences. Target audiences have included veterinary professionals in practice, research, industry and academia. Many of these presentations have also been sponsored by the American Veterinary Medical Association Professional Liability Insurance Trust (AVMA PLIT). The additional partnership from AVMA PLIT is based on reports that the majority of veterinary liability claims are driven by poor communication between veterinarians and clients. In addition, many of the trained university faculty have presented using the Bayer Communication modules and have reached over 3,000 practicing veterinarians and members of veterinary teams.

To obtain information and resources about improving communication skills and training:

Information and resources available on IHC’s website at:

http://www.healthcarecomm.org/bahcp/
Getting the Story (Mod 2)
Being able to elicit and understand the story provided by the client is essential to: a) Building a veterinarian-client relationship, b) Diagnostic accuracy and c) Gathering information, and beliefs about the pet's condition from the client. This calls for core communication skills including questioning, reflecting, empathizing, and negotiating.

Roles and Choices (Mod 3)
This module provides an overview of decision-making in veterinary practice and covers a range of roles the veterinarian takes with clients. Shared decision-making model is proposed where veterinarian and client exchange information, values, and preferences in arriving at decisions. Veterinarian and client work as partners in addressing the pet's medical care.

Euthanasia: Guiding Clients through hard decisions (Mod 4)
The module addresses many of the issues involved in the veterinarian's role in discussions about euthanasia. Issues that will be addressed include: the delivery of bad news, quality of life, options, shared decision-making, education about the euthanasia procedure, decisions about client present euthanasia, and potential grieving process.

Take 2 BID: Enhancing Adherence (Mod 5)
AHA studies reveal client adherence to be much lower than what veterinarians think. This module addresses factors that influence client adherence. Skills integral to productive interaction leading to client commitment are reinforced such as establishing trust, credibility, demonstrating empathy, and providing literacy-sensitive education.

It Goes without Saying: Nonverbal Communication in Veterinarian-Client Relationships (Mod 6)
Roughly 80% of all communication between individuals is nonverbal. Only 20% is verbal and voluntary, and represents only a small proportion of our messaging. Problems a client may be having in the animal's care are signaled in the nonverbal channel. This module was created in response to the belief that most people have no formal training in nonverbal communication.

Eye of the Beholder: Addressing Conflict (Mod 7)
This module raises learners' awareness about their own "hot buttons" during client interactions. A series of videotaped client situations and a protocol offers practice application. Skills and communication tools to help difficult relationships be successful are organized into a user-friendly skill-based model for practice.

Elephant in the Room: Money Talk with Clients (Mod 8)
Discussing money is often fraught with secrecy and high emotion yet discussing these issues openly is important to a trusting client relationship. Learners experiment with communication tools to increase confidence and competence in fee discussions with clients.

Strangers in Crisis: Partners in Care (Mod 9)
This module equips veterinarians to manage communication challenges in emergency settings. Bad news may have to be delivered and tough decisions are to be made. Time pressures abound. The module will provide learners with tools to help them effectively and efficiently establish a relationship with clients and families and communicate bad news in a way that will enhance client satisfaction and reduce complaints while also promoting excellent patient clinical care.

Are We Good Here?: Speaking of Ethics (Mod 10)
Information and technology and new social views of animals are changing practice and procedures of veterinary medicine and altering the ethical landscape. Ethical dilemmas require tools and guidelines for proposing solutions and making ethical decisions. Learners gain awareness of the nature of ethical dilemmas, a 5-step ethical decision-making process and core communication skills—all necessary steps to make an effective and ethical decision.

Breaking the Silence: Disclosing Medical Errors (Mod 11)
When medical errors result in adverse outcomes, it requires a thoughtful response on the part of the veterinarian, staff, and practice. Yet, many clinicians are fearful of formal complaints and potential malpractice suits. As a result, simply telling clinicians that "ought" to disclose an unanticipated outcome or error is ineffective. This module enables veterinarians to identify, appreciate and practice techniques essential in responding to clients constructively in these difficult situations.

Easy for you to say: Vet Team Communication (Mod 12)
Veterinarians must effectively communicate within the healthcare team and role model productive interactions related to decision-making and problem solving. Teams are influenced by interpersonal dynamics, gender and cohort differences, hierarchical roles and power differential and conflict. Learners will learn to better understand the critical components of team communication and practice skills that will facilitate communication within members of the team.

Building T.R.U.S.T. (Mod 13)
This workshop addresses unique client communication challenges faced by veterinary technicians and members of the team. Using structured activity, video, and short presentations, learners apply communication tools for practice application.

Compassion Fatigue: (Mod 14)
This workshop will help practitioners learn coping skills to manage the distress that builds from overemphasis on caring for others who are suffering and an underemphasis on care of self. Through interactive activities, veterinary professionals gain knowledge about and prevention of compassion fatigue while identifying early warning signs to reclaim the satisfaction, hope and inspiration that led to choosing this career path.

Clear the AIR: Managing conflict for vet teams (Mod 15)
We all face conflict and we all have had both positive and negative outcomes as a result of conflict. What makes conflict negative or positive is the way in which it is handled. This workshop provides information, activities, and tools for learners to help prevent conflict and manage emotions during conflict.

*Module length can vary from 1 hour (abbreviated version) to 4 hours (interactive version)
IHC Professional Services and Resources for Veterinary Medicine

Presentations and Seminars
IHC master faculty available for presentations and seminars to raise awareness about the correlation between effective communication and practice outcomes and bottom line.

Communication Assessment: Coaching for Improved Performance
Individualized professional services to veterinary hospitals and practices to enhance their customer service and communication processes within the practice culture. The service is tailored to the needs of the practice utilizing evidence-based tools and models for building upon assets within the practice and identifying gaps to improve communication, client satisfaction and practice outcomes. Services include one-on-one assessment, coaching, and feedback for improved communication performance.

Veterinary Team Workshops and Professional Development
IHC can provide personalized interactive workshops based on practice needs and preferences. Topics include core communication skills, improving client compliance, difficult interactions and addressing conflict, talking about money, sharing bad news, discussing adverse events, end of life discussions, team communication and others. To meet the unique communication needs of veterinary technicians and other members of the veterinary team, IHC newest module, Building T.R.U.S.T. offers hands-on practice tools for immediate application to improve client communication interactions.

IHC staff can work to provide a customized workshop or presentation for your staff needs.

Veterinary Team Skill-Building Workshop with Simulation
Skill-building workshops using simulation and hands-on practice sessions are available upon request customized to the needs of your practice team to improve confidence and practice success.

8-hour skill-building communication training led by IHC master faculty includes:
- 4 hour workshop customized to needs of practice
- 4 hour skill-building practice in small groups using simulated clients (actors who portray clients).
- Syllabi / Learning materials

Professional Retreats
To increase self-awareness and renewal for veterinary professionals... ....and improve practice productivity and client satisfaction

IHC-led 2.5 day structured educational retreat for veterinary professionals to help strengthen life skills in managing the distress from over-emphasis on caring for clients and patients and under-emphasis on care. This retreat promotes authentic communication practices to improve self-awareness and veterinary team morale, while enhancing client relationships.

For more information about IHC and the Bayer Communication Project, visit http://www.healthcarecomm.org/bahcp/

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