

**COLLEGE OF VETERINARY MEDICINE**

Welcome to the North Carolina State College of Veterinary Medicine (CVM) and the Veterinary Health Complex (VHC) **Small Animal Emergency and Triage Service (SAETS)**. The CVM has the breadth and depth of experts in the field that has this College ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> in the country for Colleges of Veterinary Medicine.

We are aware that learning your pet is ill is a very difficult experience and going to a new hospital, seeing a new doctor, and making decisions about treatment options can be overwhelming. It is our goal to make your experience with us positive. Towards that goal, we want to provide you with information about what you should expect from the **SAETS** regarding service and communication. Effective communication is accomplished when both parties take an active role in the process. Thus, we wanted to outline what you should expect from us as well as what we ask of you.

***What you should expect from us:***

**PATIENT CARE:** Your pet will receive excellent patient care and you will receive accurate information about the medical status of your pet so that you know all of the diagnostic and therapeutic options available. Unfortunately, medicine is not an exact science and sometimes the reason for the illness of your pet can not be determined immediately, but you can rest assured that the clinicians and staff have your pet's best interest at heart are doing everything possible for a positive outcome.

**LENGTH OF VISIT:** Because we are a teaching facility providing clinical education to students, interns and residents, your visit here may take longer than you have experienced at your primary care veterinarian's office.

**RESEARCH:** The missions of the VHC include patient care, education, and research but we do not experiment on our patients. The VHC research mission provides owners the opportunity to participate, with informed consent, in innovative new diagnostic or therapeutic treatments that are often available nowhere else, sometimes with considerable financial support for the costs of hospitalization. Should your pet's condition qualify for participation in one of our clinical trials, we will discuss this option with you. Regardless of whether your pet is enrolled in a clinical trial, providing quality care is our most important goal, and excellent care of your pet comes first.

**COSTS:** You will receive an initial estimate of the cost for services that will be updated should circumstances change.

**TREATMENT:** You will receive information regarding benefits and risks of various medical procedures and treatments so that you can make an informed decision about your options.

**COMMUNICATION:** Our goal is to provide you with excellent communication regarding the status of your pet. If your pet is hospitalized we will make every effort to contact you at least daily and after any significant medical procedure or if your pet's medical status changes.

**VISITATION:** We believe that visits and support from the family are often vital for our patients' well-being and recovery and we will make every effort to encourage and support your ability to spend time with your pet while he/she is hospitalized.

**OWNER CARE:** You will be treated compassionately and professionally.

**BILLING:** We will make every effort to provide you with a complete bill at the time of discharge. However, this is a large and complex hospital and some fees may not be posted to your account prior to discharge, resulting in your receiving a bill by mail within 10 business days after your pet is discharged.

**FACULTY:** You will always be able to speak with the senior faculty in charge of your pet's medical team if you have concerns with the care, the communication, or the process which you have experienced.

### ***What we ask of you:***

**PATIENT HISTORY:** We will interview you for a complete medical history of your pet so that a diagnostic and treatment plan can be developed.

**INFORMED DECISIONS:** We encourage you to ask questions regarding the treatment plan and associated cost so that you are informed when you make a decision regarding the medical care of your pet.

**PRIMARY VETERINARIAN:** We will contact your primary care veterinarian so that we are able to share with them the medical status of your pet to facilitate a good discharge and continued care plan.

**DISCHARGE PLAN:** In order to optimize your pet's recovery we will ask you to follow our instructions in a discharge plan we will provide when your pet is released.

**SAFETY:** We ask that you comply with the VHC's policies and procedures which are designed to create a safe working environment for our staff and excellent medical care for our patients.

**CONCERNS:** If you have any concerns regarding patient care, communication, or cost we encourage you to request a conversation with the senior faculty clinician on the team.

**BILLING:** We ask that you comply with our financial policy, which states that we will provide you with an estimate for services to be rendered, that you will pay a deposit to cover the minimum expected costs of hospitalization at the time of admission, and that you pay the balance of your bill at the time of discharge.

**FEEDBACK:** We encourage you to complete an on-line client satisfaction survey so you can provide us with feedback that helps us in determining how well we are meeting our client and patient needs.

### ***Frequently Asked Questions:***

#### **My pet was taken out of my sight to the emergency treatment area. What happens during that time?**

We bring patients to our treatment area to be assessed by our technicians and doctors upon admission. This is where we decide which patients are seen first; based on emergent need. If you have approved emergency stabilization and your pet requires urgent medical attention, we may initiate diagnostics and/or therapies as needed. If your pet appears to be in stable condition then we will assess his/her vital signs and bring him/her back to you for further consultation with the student and clinician.

#### **When am I going to see a doctor?**

There will ALWAYS be a doctor in charge of and supervising all aspects of patient care at the VHC. In many cases multiple specialists may consult on a patient should their expertise be required. Typically, a fourth-year student will first collect a detailed history and present this information to the doctor in charge. You will then have an opportunity to discuss things in detail with the doctor and together you and he/she will formulate a diagnostic and treatment plan.

#### **What does it mean to be a 'teaching hospital'?**

In addition to having access to cutting edge diagnostic tools and therapeutic alternatives, the most unique aspect of our facility is that every patient is a learning opportunity for our students. Much of this teaching is done 'behind the scenes' as we discuss your pets' diagnostics and care. What this means to you, the client, is that the process may take somewhat longer than it would at a private emergency facility. However, this also means that we have the ability to consult with multiple doctors and a variety of specialists in complex cases.

#### **What does my emergency consent approve?**

We ask you to approve an emergency estimate on admission in case your pet requires immediate emergent attention. If your pet is stable on admission and does not require immediate therapy or diagnostics, then we will discuss your pet's case in detail prior to initiating a treatment plan.

#### **My doctor introduced him/herself as an Intern or a Resident – what does that mean?**

It is important to understand that every intern or resident at the VHC is a fully licensed doctor with the same education and credentials as a general practitioner. Interns and residents have chosen to pursue additional, in-depth postgraduate

clinical training and were selected by us in a highly competitive international application process. We think you are in great hands!

**Why am I waiting longer than someone who got here after I did?**

As with all Emergency rooms ours works on a “triage” basis. This means that the most critical or unstable patients will be cared for first, even if they arrived after you. Please be assured that even though you may wait a little longer than anticipated, your pet is still a priority for us and when we are able we will spend as much time as we need discussing our findings, options, and a treatment plan.

**My doctor told me they would have information within an hour and I’ve been waiting much longer.**

We strive to give you a realistic estimate of how long things will take, but the reality of emergency medicine is that the unexpected has to be expected. It is, of course, impossible to predict what will walk in our doors at any given time and therefore our priorities can change minute to minute. While we don’t like to make our clients wait, patient care is always our first priority. We know that long waiting times are difficult; however, we also know that if your pet was in critical condition you would want us to prioritize their care.

**My regular veterinarian referred me because they said I should see a specialist. Why am I seeing an emergency doctor?**

The Emergency & Triage service handles all incoming emergent patients even if referred for a specialist. In all cases that are referred for specialty consultation, the emergency doctor in charge will consult with the on-call specialty services as needed to develop the best diagnostic and therapeutic plan for your pet. During the week, from 7am to 4pm, all cases admitted by the Triage service are also overseen by a boarded specialist in emergency critical care and/or internal medicine. We can and will perform all diagnostics and treatments necessary in an emergency setting, and non-emergent diagnostics and/or procedures will be prioritized based on the expertise of the specialty service and the primary emergency doctor. Non-emergent procedures and therapies will then be performed during regular hospital hours, which may occur the following business day.

**Is there food and water available for my pet while I wait?**

Feel free to ask the front desk for a bowl if you would like to offer water to your pet. However, we do ask that you refrain from feeding your pet. Many procedures require sedation or medication with drugs that could upset your companion’s stomach if there is food present. If your pet must eat for medical reasons (eg. diabetes), please ask the front desk to inform the doctor in charge and make sure they are aware of this first.

**I am finished with my visit, why do I have to wait?**

One of our goals for our clients is that everyone leaves with detailed discharge instructions. We know that emergency visits can be overwhelming, and we often ask you to process large amounts of information during your time with us. We write our discharge instructions in as detailed manner as possible so to help summarize the information covered during the visit and give you specific instructions as to medications, diet, activity restriction, and any other pertinent aspect of care. It may take us some additional time to write these for you; however, this can significantly ease the transition home and back to your regular veterinarian.

**You are a State facility, so why are your fees so high?**

Although the VHC does receive some financial support from the State of North Carolina the majority of our operating costs are paid by client fees and donations. In fact, many of the state-of-the-art diagnostic and treatment options we offer are only possible because of generous gifts from our clients. Our fees are set to cover the balance of our operating costs, and we are always looking for ways to provide better service at lower cost. Unfortunately, many of the tests and treatments we depend on for patient care are expensive for us to provide, and we must pass these costs on to those who benefit from them.