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Wellness exams as a profit center

Your clients and their horses can benefit from wellness exams, and those exams can even out your cash flow.

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We all like the idea of providing the best care to our equine patients, and in particular providing quality preventive care. Offering wellness exams to your clients can be good for them and their horses, as well as beneficial to your practice's bottom line. These annual or twice-yearly appointments get you on the horse owner's property to evaluate each horse for new problems and to reassess old issues.

An added benefit is that an equine wellness program streamlines veterinary work and income throughout the year rather than bunching vet visits into seasonal spring and fall periods. When appointments are strategically spread throughout the year, the business retains a steadier revenue stream.

Promote the concept of wellness exams to your clients by promoting the idea that checking on health issues routinely will solve problems down the road. In short, their horses are likely to have fewer medical emergencies, be protected from communicable diseases, and have less dental disease and parasite-related colic. It will initially take effort on your part to educate horse owners and trainers about the value of wellness exams and how they prevent health problems while also helping a horse perform to its optimum potential.

Equine veterinarians are skilled in picking up nuances that a horse owner easily overlooks. Early recognition of common health problems enables opportunities for early correction. By bundling your services within the platform of a wellness exam, you can ultimately end up with a greater profit margin. Instead of piecemeal services provided through many visits to the farm, all the important aspects of routine equine care are addressed during one or two annual visits—a dental exam, fecal egg count, deworming, EIA testing, immunizations, a physical and soundness exam, nutritional consultation, and blood tests and endocrine evaluation (in appropriate cases). Clients need to know specifically what services are included. Your clients might welcome choices of wellness packages that offer multiple levels of customized services at varying set costs.

One good marketing strategy to show clients how wellness programs benefit them is to lock in fees for the year when they sign up. Another benefit to tout is the value to the horse that results from consistent assessment and veterinary care. Also, time spent on the farm with wellness checks helps build relationships with your clients to develop a partnership working on behalf of their horses. The result is a pleasurable experience that benefits client and patient—and also your bottom line.

You can target specific age groups for your wellness exam programs. It makes good medical and business sense to provide multiple wellness checks over the first year of life to neonates and growing youngsters. These visits enable you to provide strategic immunization against relevant infectious diseases and to check for signs of developmental orthopedic disease (DOD), joint effusion, lameness, umbilical hernias and retained testicles. Early recognition and monitoring helps determine if and when surgical intervention is necessary and also enables effective veterinarian-farrier collaboration.

Pre-teen and teenage horses might do fine with once- or twice-yearly wellness exams, but geriatric horses might need 3-4 visits a year. A more frequent schedule facilitates early detection and monitoring of PPID (Cushing's disease), renal or liver dysfunction, chronic lameness and nutritional concerns, as well as ensuring proper attention to the dental needs of the older horse.



Take-Home Message

To maximize the use of wellness exams to improve your bottom line, you'll need to actively educate your clients about the value of using this service. Use mailings, social media, emails, statement stuffers, and have clinic staff and veterinarians advise clients of this opportunity.

Once horse owners begin to look at such visits as similar to the annual small animal exam, it'll turn into a constant revenue stream for you. You also have the opportunity to utilize the program developed by AAEP Touch: Tools to Connect to Your Clients and Their Horses (touch.aaep.org). The Touch program additionally provides you with ideas of what skills and services you can provide that your clients consider valuable for their horses' care.