

March 11, 2005

Professor Dale Sullivan
North Dakota State University
320 Minard
Fargo, ND 58105

Dear Professor Sullivan:

Enclosed is the final report on discourse communities in the field of veterinary technology for the web-based section of *English 320 – Practical Writing* at North Dakota State University.

The report is a result of research conducted to gain knowledge on the use of discourse in veterinary medicine through methods such as web-based research and an interview with a professional in the field of veterinary technology. Also included is an analysis of a medical document commonly used in the veterinary profession.

If any further information is need regarding this report, please contact me at the address below.

Sincerely,

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Enclosure

Veterinary Discourse:
Communication Practices in the Field of Veterinary Technology

Prepared by:
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English 320 – Practical Writing

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Abstract

This report discusses the discourse practices used in the field of veterinary technology. The introduction explains the purpose of this research and the scope of the research. The methods section recounts the research process I went through in writing this paper. The results and discussion section includes a discussion of my findings and the kinds and types of documents used in the veterinary profession. A close analysis of one of these documents is also included in this portion. Finally, the conclusion will summarize this report and will explain what I have learned from this research.

Introduction

Communication is an essential part to any veterinary hospital, and plays a vital role in the hospital's success. This is a report of research conducted to answer the question of how veterinary technicians communicate in the field of veterinary medicine, whether it is communication with each other or with clients. Those entering the field of veterinary technology should be aware of the communication practices of those already in the field.

According to Carol Berkenkotter and Thomas N. Huckin (1995), "understanding the genres of written communication in one's field is essential to professional success" (p. 1). This report focuses on the communication that takes place between members of the veterinary profession while in a hospital setting.

Since members of the veterinary profession interact and communicate often, they can be thought of as being a discourse community. Discourse communities are "groups that have goals or purposes, and use communication to achieve these goals" (Borg, 2003, p.398). Discourse communities differ from speech and informative communities in that unlike a speech community, membership of a discourse community is most often a matter of choice, and unlike an informative community, "members of a discourse community actively share goals and communicate with other members to pursue those goals" (Borg, 2003, p. 398).

As members of discourse communities interact and communicate genres and forums are formed. As time goes on, members of these communities find that similar situations continue to present themselves, forming genres. Genres can be thought of as "the media through which scholars and scientists communicate" (Berkenkotter and Huckin, 1995, p. 1). A forum is thought of as a place

where communication occurs, or the medium used to communicate. James E. Porter (1986) states that forum can be analyzed by a series of questions regarding style, form, background, and discourse conventions (p. 46-47).

Knowledge of how members of the veterinary community communicate is necessary for those who wish to be members of this field. It is essential for those involved in veterinary medicine to have knowledge of the ways in which discourse is used in their field, and have an understanding of the types of genres involved in communication practices.

Materials and Methods

Initially, the research for this report began as web-based. This process was helpful in gathering reports on discourse communities to gain a better understanding of how these communities function in the veterinary field. Web-based research provided more in depth information on the concept of discourse communities, but it was also necessary to obtain information from someone who actually interacts in this community.

An interview was then conducted with a licensed Veterinary Technician employed at a local veterinary hospital. The information obtained from this interview provides a more personal view of how members of this discourse community interact. Information was obtained on common discourse practices in the veterinary profession, and the types of documents used to do so.

Lastly, a medical document by veterinary technicians was analyzed. This was necessary to understand the format and relevance of these written documents used in the veterinary profession.

Results and Discussion

Veterinary Technicians provided technical assistance in veterinary practices, biological laboratories, food inspection, and animal research. For this report, the focus will be on veterinary practices. Veterinary Technicians are expected to conduct a variety of duties and tasks that include, but are not limited to, assisting with surgeries, client education, laboratory work, administration of meds and vaccinations, and animal restraint (Career Matters).

Writing and speaking effectively are also abilities needed by veterinary technicians in their field of work. According to Bekki Atkins, a licensed veterinary technician, (personal communication, February 18, 2005) 50% of her time is spent speaking, and 25% writing.

Atkins also stated that communication with clients is a major part of a veterinary technician's job. This involves providing a clear explanation to the client on everything from caring for their pet, how to administer medications, and post-surgery care. She states that it is important that when speaking with clients, the technicians be aware that the medical language used in the communication between members of the field may not be understood by those out side of the field. When those employed at the clinic communicate, they are able to use the medical language that the hospital's clients may not understand. Atkins states that "you have to be

careful when talking or writing to clients so that you don't talk above them, but at the same time not treating them like they don't know anything" (personal communication, February 18, 2005). Writing is also a major part of the communications process in veterinary medicine. I found in my interview with Bekki Atkins, that the major document used in written communication between technicians and veterinarians is the client/patient file or record (personal communication, February 18, 2005). An analysis and a description of one of these documents occur later in this report.

Upon gathering documents used in the veterinary field, I found that they can be divided into categories. Those categories are legal, laboratory, client education. Legal documents include the patient treatment sheets, comprising the patient files, surgery consent forms, and vaccination forms. Atkins states that these are documents, which for legal reasons, must be completed in a thorough manner, and can be used in legal disputes as evidence. Laboratory documents are forms that report on laboratory tests performed on individual patients. Some laboratory tests are so specialized that not every veterinary hospital has the means to perform these tests. Also included in this category are forms that request these specific tests to be conducted. Client education sheets include documents that provide information on a specific subject the client wishes to read more about. These documents attempt to answer any questions the client may have and are often in pamphlet form. They are designed to explain information in a way that the client can understand.

Document Analysis

The treatment sheets are two separate documents. One document provides spaces to record dates of vaccinations administered to the animal and surgeries performed on the animal. This sheet is not meant to contain details about procedures, but is rather meant to provide basic information on the animal without having to read through all of the detailed information that is provided in the other document. This document provides space for the writing of the detailed accounts of procedures performed on the animal, along with space to record the animal's weight and body temperature.. They both provide basic patient information at the top of the document, such as the animal's name, species, breed, owner name and number, and a brief description of the animal.

One of the most important documents written in the field of veterinary medicine is the patient treatment sheets which are compiled to form the patient's file. These forms provide dated accounts of all procedures done on an animal, along with any other pertinent information such as allergies, pre-existing medical conditions, past surgeries, and vaccination histories. Aside from being valuable information for the staff at the veterinary hospital, these patient files are also legal documents.

When analyzing these documents, it is clear that the audiences they are directed towards are typically the Veterinarians, Veterinary Technicians, and other members of the veterinary field of study. Since the documents in these files are meant to be read by members of this medical field, they consist of many medical terms and abbreviations that the general public most likely would not understand the meaning of.

It is necessary that the information written in these documents be clear, thorough, and complete. The reader should be able to understand the what, where, when, who, and how of a procedure with no questions asked. It is vital that even what might be considered at minor detail involved with a procedure be noted on these records. This type of information is useful when making diagnoses if patients experience adverse side effects, and also in legal dispute cases. Failure to note pertinent information on a patient's treatment sheet could mean a huge loss for the hospital if they are found to be cause of the medical problem.

Conclusion

Before conducting the research necessary for this report, I did have an idea of how members of the veterinary community communicated since I have taken many classes on the subject of veterinary technology. However, I did not realize exactly how necessary and important this communication was. I feel that the most informative part of this report was conducting the interview with a professional in my field of study. The interview leads me to a better understanding of the methods and types of discourse used in the veterinary profession. In writing this paper, I have come to see that effective discourse practices are an essential part of a successful veterinary hospital, as well as being essential to a successful career as a Veterinary Technician.

References

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Robinson Hall Veterinary Wellness Clinic

Patient's Name..... Identification Number

Species CANINE DOB..... Sex F F(s) M M(n)

Breed..... Description.....

Owner - FM Humane Society Adopt-A-Pet

Past History

Vaccinations

Other

Date	Rabies	DHPP	Bordetella	HWT	Parasite Check	Rx	Weight
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Location

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Location

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Vaccinations

Other

Date	Rabies	DHPP	Bordetella	HWT	Parasite Check	Rx	Weight
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Procedures or Problems List

Date	Procedure or Problem	Date Resolved
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