

Communication, staff retention and billing – implementing an animal health system.

At Vanderbilt University in Nashville, as in most other research focused academic institutions, the facility staff is focused on effectively serving our customers. These customers include the researchers, our own husbandry and vet technician staff, and most importantly, the animals in our care.

When it comes to dealing with animal health issues we identified a few key objectives for improvement when reviewing our current processes.

- Communication of health issues and expectations to the researchers. This can directly improve animal care based on timely interventions, but also allows the PIs to control their spending more closely (we allow the research teams to treat their own animals in many cases).
- Improving efficiency for our facility staff. For us, staff retention and job satisfaction within the facility is the most effective way to ensure the quality of animal care and running of an efficient program.
- More accurate and timely billing. When veterinary services are billed to the PI, having the costs captured directly and billed as part of their monthly facility bills allows more efficient processing, more visibility for the PIs and better cost recovery for us.

As an existing user of TOPAZ Elements it made sense for us to investigate using the Veterinary Management module to achieve our objectives. Being integrated with the rest of Elements means that the animals, cages, PIs, rooms, and staff are already in the system and do not need to be set up.

With the assistance of TOPAZ services staff during an onsite visit, we defined four “task templates” to help with tracking;

- Dead animals
- Health issues and treatment tracking
- Overcrowded cages
- Sentinel submissions

The intention was to keep this as simple as possible, allowing technicians to trigger emails from within the system, provide “active case” lists to keep track of treatments and to bill for services provided. For the initial implementation we limited this to our rodent population only.

“Our staff benefit from the system in simple ways like not having to maintain manual email templates and look up email addresses”

Key lessons

The project was successful, we believe, because we were able to focus on a small number of key objectives. We did not try to automate the entirety of our animal health process, instead focusing on just 3 pain points. This allowed us to set up a very simple process with TOPAZ that caused the minimum of disruption to our staff.

Customer testimony provided by Karen Jackson, Director of Administration and Finance at Vanderbilt University Medical Center