

Blood Pressure Measurement



Increasing a Clinic's Image & Profitability

By: Anthony Carr

Market Situation

There are considerable pressures on practitioners today. These pressures include economic constraints from loss of revenue sources such as vaccinations, maintaining an optimal work environment for veterinarians and staff, and increased competition. A positive development has been the recognition of the bond between pets and their owners. This bond results in owners wanting optimal care for their pets. Optimal care does not just consist of diagnosing and treating disease once clinical signs begin, but to prevent or at least detect problems as early as possible, thereby hopefully being able to intervene to stop or at least slow the progression of the problem. Blood pressure measurement is a way to offer benefits both to the owner and the pet as well as to the practice.

- Good medicine always makes sense;
- Measuring blood pressure is good medicine.

Why will Blood Pressure Measurement be a Successful Addition to your Practice?

An important factor why blood pressure measurement can be a very useful addition to a veterinary practice is because owners accept the importance of this test implicitly. It is much more likely that an owner will want a test done if they understand the purpose behind it.

- There is considerable media information on the importance of blood pressure measurement and hypertension in humans;
- Most people have their blood pressure routinely measured during visits to physicians;
- Many people have acquaintances or family members that suffer from hypertension and its consequences;
- Blood pressure monitors are present in many drugstores;
- Many people may even own their own blood pressure monitor.

Measuring Blood Pressure Routinely is a Smart Marketing Move!

Measuring blood pressure can be a positive marketing move for your practice. To paraphrase Catanzaro and Seibert in their book the veterinary practice does not sell a product, it sells peace of mind.

Monitoring blood pressure is a way to ensure peace of mind!

This is especially true in those patients that often have abnormal blood pressures such as those that have illnesses that cause hypertension or those undergoing anesthesia where hypotension is a common complication. As part of a wellness program blood pressure measurement also offers peace of mind since only by measuring blood pressure can abnormalities be ruled out.

By offering better care, the image of your practice is improved. Currently, blood pressure measurement is in its infancy and is not routinely available in most practices. Many practices that have the technology do not actively

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market this service to their clients. According to Messonnier, marketing is defined as "finding out what your clients want and giving it to them".

What many want is "preventive health care; most of our clients are begging us to meet their needs and serve them".

Blood pressure measurement is such a routine part of wellness programs in humans that owners will want it for their pets as well, provided it is offered. This does mean that not only must the technology be available to routinely, rapidly and accurately measure blood pressure but the owners must also know that it is a service provided by the clinic!

Inform your pet owners:

- Offer blood pressure measurement as a component of wellness, geriatric and pre-anesthetic screening programs. Also measure blood pressure before administering any medications known to affect blood pressure such as ACE inhibitors, beta blockers, sedatives, etc.;
- Have literature available in the practice on the importance of blood pressure measurement in small animals;
- When using HDO - let the pet owner watch the blood pressure measurement on screen - this tremendously increases the faith in the results. Eventually even print out the gif picture of the reading.
- Include information on blood pressure in practice newsletters;
- If blood pressure measurement was performed during an anesthetic procedure, charge separately for it or at least list it as carried out in the invoice. The owner should be aware of the high quality of medical care their pet received!

Measuring Blood Pressure can be a Valuable Aid in Improving the Work Environment in your Practice!

Staff motivation is a vital consideration in practice.

The three R's of staff employment are:

Respect - Responsibility - Recognition.

Blood pressure measurement is an ideal way to increase the responsibilities and thereby recognition of veterinary technicians.

It is less than ideal to have a veterinarian, measure blood pressure routinely. This is not an effective use of time and would necessitate charging relatively high fees for this procedure. It makes more sense to measure blood pressure more frequently for less than to do it rarely for more.

By having the veterinary technician measure blood pressure it is possible to charge a moderate fee rather than exorbitant fee. It also should not be forgotten that veterinarians are often under considerable time pressures. Therefore the patience and attention to detail that is needed to achieve valid blood pressure results may not be present.

The front office staff and the technicians should market blood pressure measurement.

This can be the basis for an incentive program, recognizing those individuals that have been able to promote blood pressure measurement the most effectively. Of course, for an incentive program to work it is vital that the staff sees that this program is a benefit to both pet and owner. It therefore is important to spend time educating the staff as to the merits of this diagnostic procedure.

Amortizing the Investment in a Blood Pressure Monitoring Device

Measuring blood pressure makes medical sense and has other advantages as outlined above. As with any equipment purchased, it should however also pay for itself or more ideally be a profit source.

There are certain factors that will determine whether or not it will be a profit source:

- **Fee structure:** it makes sense to charge less and do more than to charge more and do less. The more measurements that are carried out

the more skilled the operator is and as a result the more consistent the results will be plus the faster the measurement is done. By measuring blood pressure in many animals, general awareness of this procedure increases in the client population;

- **The equipment itself:** The equipment should allow rapid and accurate determination of blood pressure with minimal need for support staff. In this regard Oscillometric devices and even more HDO (High Definition Oscillometry) have a clear advantage over Doppler devices. With Doppler it often requires two skilled people to obtain readings (one to restrain, one to measure blood pressure);
- **Who is using the equipment:** It will be easier to amortize the equipment if a veterinary technician is doing the measurements than if a veterinarian is doing them. The veterinarian's time is expensive and as such this will cut down on the profit margin.

The following is a rough calculation of the economics of blood pressure measurement.

The charge for blood pressure measurement should be reasonable. The price that is charged will depend upon the amount of effort it takes to get a reading. There probably is justification to charge more for cats than dogs since obtaining a reading in a cat is almost always associated with more effort. For this example let us assume the fee is \$ 15 per reading.

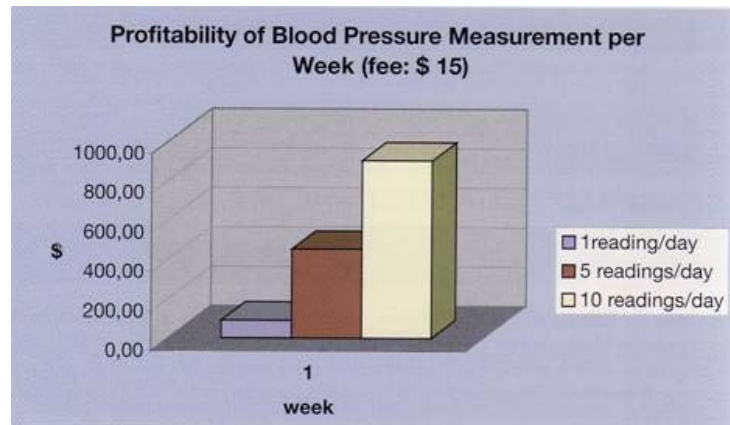


Fig. 1 -1: Generated income per week: \$ 90 (1 reading/day) up to \$ 900 (10 readings/day)

If you do one measurement a day this will generate on average \$ 3,900 a year. If **5 readings a day are done** this translates into almost **\$20,000**.

From this revenue expenses have to be paid including:

- Cost of equipment: \$ 1,500 - \$ 3,000 for an HDO or oscillometric device;
- Labor cost: In most dogs and cats 5 minutes is adequate to get 5 good readings. With one case a day this adds up to 22 hours per year. With 5 cases a day it adds up to close to 110 hours.

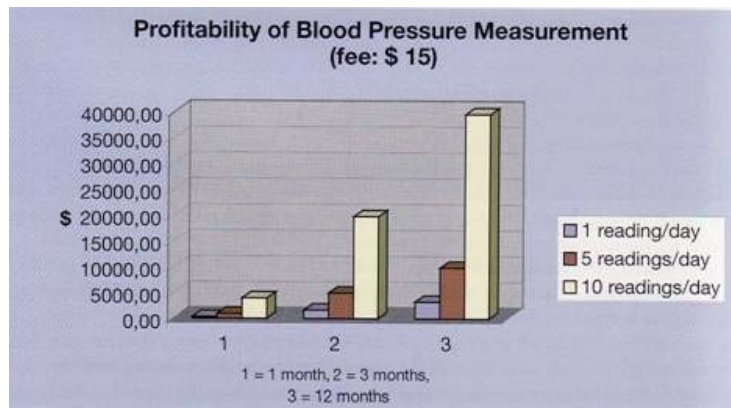


Fig. 1-2: Generated income per month, 3 months, and per year depending on the frequency of measuring blood pressure. Almost \$40,000 with only 10 readings/day.

After the equipment is paid off, the fees are directly converted into profit. With 5 readings/day this results in an additional yearly income and hourly payment respectively of:

→ **\$20,000 / 110 hours = \$ 181.80/hour!!!**

From these calculations it is easy to see that blood pressure measurement can easily be a profit center for your practice!

Blood pressure measurement: the economic bottom line:

- With HDO additional information like arrhythmias can be collected which consequently lead to additional diagnostic investigations/treatment regimens and thus further profit.
- Measuring blood pressure is good medicine and makes good economic sense;
- It makes economic sense to have technicians be responsible for measuring blood pressure;
- It makes economic sense to have receptionists and technicians responsible for marketing blood pressure;
- If done correctly, blood pressure monitoring can improve the self esteem of the hospital staff by increasing their responsibility and providing a way to recognize their achievements.

Excerpt from: B. Egner, A. Carr, S. Brown (eds). Essential Facts of Blood Pressure in Dogs and Cats. A Reference Guide. 2nd Edition, BE VetVerlag, 2007. Available from Lifelearn.

Click for more information on [Essential Facts of Blood Pressure in Dogs & Cats](#).

Is Your Website Working for Your Clients?



To ensure that your website is meeting the needs of your existing clients, as well as attracting new customers, here are some common client expectations to consider:

Finding Your Website Easily

What's the use of having a great website if no one can find it? Registering the website domain with the major search engines (Google, Yahoo, MSN) is one important step to having the practice website found by clients searching the web. Adding the website to online local directories or other pet businesses is another way to optimize internet searches. Possible web locations include city business websites, yellow page directories, veterinary association and group online directories, and pet-related business websites. Whenever you consider adding a link to a related association or business on your website, ask if they would consider also adding a link to your practice website!

Basic Clinic Information Right Up Front

Having to click through many pages can be frustrating at the best of times. Complete clinic information (address, phone numbers) is ideally placed on the

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home or front page of your website. But don't forget that the website is now one more piece of the clinic's basic information. The website address should appear on all company correspondence and be included in telephone and yellow page directories, both in print and online. If clients know the website address, this eliminates the added time and frustration in searching for the website on the internet.

Pet Health Information

The internet is often the first place someone goes to for more information. General pet health information and training on common pet problems (e.g. giving a cat a pill) provides existing clients with tools and information to supplement their regular visits and answer their questions quickly. For potential and existing customers, coming back to your website for more information, reinforces your clinic's expertise and keeps the clinic "top of mind".

Booking Appointments and Refilling Prescriptions Online

Busy hectic lives are the norm these days. And if your clients could request an appointment or a prescription refill when they first remember to, no matter what time of day or place – then it's likely not to be forgotten or put off! Clients are also coming to appreciate email vaccination and other reminders.

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