

# Pet insurance coordinator:

## STEPPING STONE TO YOUR FUTURE

*The role of pet insurance coordinator affords a dual opportunity: make a positive impact on your patients' health and grow your professional skills.*

### **Establishing yourself**

as an indispensable member of a veterinary hospital's support staff takes determination, applied expertise, and a role that showcases your value. For veterinary professionals looking to make their mark, the position of pet insurance coordinator is a fantastic place to start. Whether as a primary title or a complement to other responsibilities, the role is becoming increasingly vital to the success of practices across the country because the owners of insured pets are typically more compliant with veterinary health care recommendations, which ultimately increases revenue for the practice. On an individual level, the interpersonal and leadership skills developed as pet insurance coordinator are sure to make your resume shine. →





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But don't take it from us. We spoke with pet insurance coordinators from hospitals on both coasts to learn more about how this role has become an essential part of client care.

### **AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE TEAM**

Pet insurance coordinator is a multifaceted role that requires astute attention to detail and adaptability. “As the coordinator, I end up being the first line of communication for any pet insurance companies looking to be promoted,” says Sara Hogan, hospital manager at Clarendon Animal Care in Arlington, Virginia. Establishing and maintaining relationships with pet insurance company representatives is pivotal to ensuring clients have access to valuable options.

The coordinator tends to be the staff member to whom clients turn to learn more about the benefits of pet health insurance. “I am required to make sure our hospital provides the best medical care and options for our patients,” says Cristine Constantine, practice manager and de facto insurance coordinator at All Animals Veterinary Hospital in Calabasas, California. “This includes taking the time to communicate with clients when they arrive with their new pet for a wellness exam, as well as discussing the importance of pet insurance in more grave situations when they arise.”

As if that's not enough, coordinators are very involved in educating—or at least coordinating the education for—the rest of the hospital staff on all things pet insurance, from which companies

the hospital is recommending, to how and when to speak with clients about insurance, to distributing marketing materials, and the like.

## STRENGTHEN SOFT SKILLS

The veterinary industry may be rooted in science and technology, but it takes less than 3 minutes in a hospital to realize that soft skills are equally important. While it is possible to learn the fundamentals of active listening and communication in a classroom, those skills are honed through hands-on experience. For pet insurance coordinators, there is no shortage of opportunities to learn, improve, and demonstrate the skills in their quiver.

### Communication

Strong communication skills are vital to every role in the veterinary industry and one of the keys to professional success. Through meeting with insurance representatives and educating clients and coworkers, insurance coordinators have endless opportunities to enhance their verbal and nonverbal communication skills. Without a doubt, "discussing pet insurance with team members and clients helps improve client communication," Constantine says.

And how you communicate with clients makes a quantifiable difference. According to Jamie Watson, hospital director at Mixed Pet Veterinary Hospital in Charlotte, North Carolina, marketing materials have their purpose, but there is no substitute for an honest conversation. "Mainly, we try to talk to clients and explain why it is important for them to have insurance," she says. "I feel like having that conversation is so much more imperative than sending home a simple pamphlet."

### Critical thinking

The ongoing pandemic has made it abundantly clear that thinking outside the box is essential to success. Pet insurance coordinators have had to devise new techniques for ensuring clients receive the information necessary to make informed decisions. Hospitals that once relied on in-person educational sessions with pet insurance representatives have had to create online events and video promotions to reach clients.

### Emotional intelligence

The ability to recognize, understand, manage, and reason with emotions is a trait many employers look for in prospective team members. Learning to navigate conversations with clients about the benefits of pet insurance strengthens interpersonal relationships and the ability to empathize with others.

This has been one of the areas where Josh Lanting, hospital administrator at Alicia Pet Care Center in Mission Viejo, California, has noticed personal growth. "[The position] allows you to really express empathy for your clients. Having empathy and being able to understand how pet insurance works are important for somebody coming into the veterinary industry."

### Leadership

Coordinators must work to establish themselves as an authority on pet health insurance while also adequately relaying information to team members who will support their efforts. "My team must also be trained to discuss the many questions that clients may have about pet insurance benefits and the importance of the coverage. It is something that we deal with every day and must always be prepared for," Constantine says. ➡



## Willingness to learn

The world of pet insurance is ever-evolving, as are the coverage options and plans available. "For me to provide the right information to my team members and clients, I must have the most up-to-date information," Constantine says. This may include new providers and plans entering the market, an increase in deductibles, changes to coverage options, and how to process claims.

The industry is not without its nuances. "I think a lot of people do not fully understand [pet health insurance] and, therefore, do not advocate for it. It is kind of difficult to understand unless you really dig deep," Watson says.

## PLAY AN ACTIVE ROLE IN CLIENT COMPLIANCE

Hogan and Watson agree that establishing a foundation of trust with clients that promotes compliance is one of the most rewarding aspects of the pet insurance coordinator position.



"We have many clients without pet insurance who make decisions based on finances rather than on their pets' health. Then, you jump over to people who have insurance, and they can make their decisions based on the doctor's recommendations, not the financials," Watson

says. "That is huge, not only for the pet but the practice as well. It allows the doctors to practice medicine."

Hogan concurs, adding that "clients feel grateful that someone is looking out for their financial well-being, and the hospital benefits two-fold because clients are spending money and we get to see the pet get the best treatment."

Watson recalls a particular instance where a client's puppy fell from a parking garage. "He was lucky to have landed in some bushes, but it was still very bad," she says. Thankfully, the client had pet health insurance from Nationwide. "Had insurance not been in play, I honestly do not know what would have happened," she says. "But being that the owners had insurance, they went the distance with him, and he is here and he is alive."

"We recommend pet insurance to every single client because we know the value of it," Lanting says. "Knowing that there is some assistance for them really helps clients make the right choice for their pet."

As medical advancements continue to unfold and pet parents go to greater lengths to ensure their furry family members receive the best care, pet insurance will be less of an option and more of a necessity. Having someone on staff to fulfill the role of the expert will be imperative, too.

"In this line of work, where there is so much compassion fatigue, burnout, and stress, it feels really good to do what is medically necessary," Hogan says. "I think that is the biggest plus there is." ■



## Promote your skills

Pet insurance coordinators gain a host of valuable and versatile skills. To ensure that future employers value them, too, consider how some of these skills may apply to your updated resume:

- **Critical thinking:** Describe how you helped your practice pivot during the pandemic.
- **Event planning:** Has your hospital hosted events or seminars to educate clients about pet health insurance options? Describe your role in ensuring their success.
- **Marketing:** Review your part in educating your clients on the benefits of pet insurance by utilizing marketing materials from pet insurance providers.
- **Multitasking:** Consider the ways you coordinate your work with insurance representatives, clients, and fellow staff members on a daily basis.
- **Problem-solving:** Nationally, less than 2% of pet owners have pet health insurance. How has your role improved that statistic for your individual hospital?
- **Training:** How have you helped the other team members better understand and promote pet insurance?

**Bonus:** Don't forget about all the soft skills you've mastered!

