



Dumb Friends League Solutions — Veterinary Hospital Concept Paper

The Dumb Friends League exists to prevent pet homelessness and end animal suffering. It is estimated that within the Denver metropolitan area more than 240,000 animals are cared for by people living in extremely low income households. While some believe those who cannot afford pets should not have them, it is important to acknowledge the incredible value these relationships have for both people and their pets. Without veterinary care, however, these animals represent the most significant challenge to accomplishing our mission to end animal suffering.

Solutions – Veterinary Hospital has five guiding principles:

- Prevent animal suffering
- Alleviate suffering of animals in our community
- Maximize our impact
- Enhance the dignity of those we serve
- Work collaboratively with the veterinary community

Prevention of animal suffering is paramount in this population. When families are living in poverty, it is common to be overwhelmed with urgent issues. Planning and investing in disease prevention is understandably not often prioritized over meeting basic needs of nutrition, housing and safety. The challenge this approach poses is two-fold—the suffering that preventable diseases cause and the increased cost of treating them. To illustrate this difficulty, and because it is such a significant problem in our community, let's look at the parvovirus infection. Parvovirus is a painful, life-threatening condition, and most cases can be successfully treated at a cost between \$500-\$2,000. There is an extremely effective vaccine that, for an entire series of three, would cost approximately \$50 at Solutions – Veterinary Hospital.

In an average month last year, there were more than 50 cases of parvovirus at the PetAid Animal Hospital, which is the predecessor to Solutions – Veterinary Hospital. Veterinary hospitals within five miles reported fewer than two cases per month, which is a result of higher vaccination rates. At the minimum treatment cost, \$25,000 was invested in treating parvovirus in one month, and 50 animals benefitted. Five hundred dogs could have been protected from suffering from this disease if vaccination had occurred. In one year, with the same investment, 6,000 dogs would be spared from this horrible disease. Widespread vaccination will mitigate the prevalence of infectious diseases throughout our community.

An additional, and very serious, concern about disease prevention is the fatal threat to both humans and pets posed by rabies. The pet vaccine against the rabies virus is almost universally protective. Colorado's Front Range is in the midst of a rabies epidemic with infection rates higher

than ever. The Colorado Department of Public Health communicated the urgency regarding getting pets vaccinated, and many in the underserved population are at a higher risk of being exposed to rabies because their pets are not protected.

With accessible protection through vaccination, pets will not have to suffer painful diseases, and people in the community will be at lower risk of exposure to rabies. Donor investment in the prevention of suffering will impact 10 times as many animals through this approach. To achieve this goal, Solutions – Veterinary Hospital plans to hold vaccination clinics twice weekly. Core vaccines will be offered at a reasonable cost, and this will be the same regardless of which core vaccines are administered or whether a veterinary exam is involved. Exams will be cursory to facilitate the number of pets that need this care. However, any pet with an identified medical concern will be scheduled (or transferred at that point) to a full consultation. Fees will be waived for any pet owner who cannot afford vaccination for their pets. The frequency of vaccination clinics will vary based on demand.

Alleviate suffering of animals in our community

Pets in struggling households are often at even higher risk of developing painful and debilitating diseases because of decreased vaccination rates, nutritional deficiencies associated with inexpensive diets and diets that aren't species specific, lack of annual veterinary examination to identify progressive diseases in their early and treatable stages, and lack of understanding of other health risk factors (i.e., toxins, obesity, dental disease). It's daunting to think about the challenge of addressing injury and disease in the estimated 240,000 animals not currently receiving care.

Several models of care used to help the underserved population have been researched, and it was determined that Solutions – Veterinary Hospital will use a hybrid approach of these existing programs. Relieving suffering is a vital component of our mission, and Solutions – Veterinary Hospital emphasizes investment in this care. A thoughtful approach must be followed to maximize impact especially when discussing relieving suffering, which is an area where resources are consumed quickly.

Common conditions that we will address include parvovirus, traumatic injuries, dental disease, abscesses, ear infections, skin diseases, intestinal obstruction, pyometra, cancer and urinary tract disease. Whether it is the pain of a broken bone or the discomfort of severe allergies, suffering must be alleviated.

Maximize our impact

Solutions – Veterinary Hospital will not provide all services available in a general veterinary practice. What we do provide we will do well. **Our treatment decisions will be based on providing a good quality of life and not on providing the longest life possible.** We will provide skilled, comprehensive physical examinations, as well as basic necessary tests, including the use of digital radiography. However, we will not offer ultrasound, MRI, extensive pathology testing beyond histopathology, nor will we provide advanced surgical procedures such as TPLO, bone plating nor spinal surgery. Our treatment plans will be based on the most efficient path to creating a good quality of life for as many animals as possible.

What we do, we will do well. For example, dental extractions will be performed by veterinarians with pre and post extraction radiology and surgical extraction techniques. We follow strict sterility

protocols, including full gown, sterile gloves, masks and caps for sterile surgical procedures. We will proactively address pain in all patients. While there will be different treatment options, a high standard of care within each option will be maintained.

A practical approach will be taken when addressing disease. For example, a male cat with a urinary tract obstruction that presents to a general practice will usually be sedated, have both an IV catheter and urinary catheter placed, be hospitalized for several days and receive several medications and have varying degrees of follow up care and recurrence. The clients Solutions – Veterinary Hospital serves will often not have the ability to provide therapeutic diets to prevent recurrence, nor will they be able to provide emergency care should the obstruction recur. For these reasons, definitive surgical treatment will be considered at the first presentation of obstruction, which is a treatment usually reserved for recurrent presentations in most general practices.

Surgical procedures will be grouped into levels, initially I through III. There will be a set fee for each level, and regardless of any complications that fee will be honored so the pet owner knows exactly what they will owe. If a dental procedure is considered a level II procedure and costs \$350, then regardless of the number of extractions, the bill will be \$350. Solutions – Veterinary Hospital will stand behind all procedures and address complications directly.

Enhance the dignity of those we serve

Accepting help can be difficult. At Solutions – Veterinary Hospital we understand that without our clients' willingness to take precious time and humbly ask for assistance we would not have the opportunity to prevent or to alleviate suffering in their pets. The Dumb Friends League, our donors and the veterinary community want the Solutions – Veterinary Hospital resources to serve the pets in greatest need. Historically, income qualification has been used to attempt to meet this desire. However, traditional income qualification can be demeaning to the client. When asked for proof of income, clients may hear "Please tell us how poor you really are". Additionally, proof of income requirements create a real vulnerability for undocumented pet owners who do not believe they can risk their own safety to provide care for their pets.

While the ideal solution to this conundrum has yet to be discovered, the Dumb Friends League is committed to finding ways to both enhance the dignity of our clients and invest our resources in the areas of most need. The location of the Solutions – Veterinary Hospital is one deterrent to abuse of this resource. Additionally, marketing of these services will be strategically focused on only underserved communities. Our messaging, both at the hospital and on our website, will include the following:

A Sign of Respect

The Dumb Friends League Solutions – Veterinary Hospital exists to prevent and alleviate suffering in pets whose caretakers would otherwise be unable to provide this care. Out of respect for our clients and out of concern of creating barriers when documentation is challenging, we serve our clients on an honor system. If you can otherwise afford to provide care for your pet, please obtain that care from one of the excellent veterinarians in our community. Care received at this hospital is made possible by donations intended to create a safety net so no pet suffers.

Work collaboratively with the veterinary community

The amount of suffering relieved, the number of animals served and the strength of the safety net for pets in our community will be determined in great part by our veterinary and animal welfare partners truly working together. This must be based on trust.

The veterinary community must trust that Solutions – Veterinary Hospital will promote the value of veterinary medicine, seek to serve only those in significant need, make thoughtful medical decisions within unique parameters and have clear and positive communication. Solutions – Veterinary Hospital is an investment in the Dumb Friends League’s mission and will not be a profit center.

The animal welfare community must trust that the veterinary community will refer only patients with the most significant need, that they will enhance the reputation of the Solutions – Veterinary Hospital within the community, they will encourage their clients to support this work and they seek to have clear and positive communication.

Solutions – Veterinary Hospital staff will educate clients about what services are not offered, what general practitioners offer and why the fees at Solutions – Veterinary Hospital are different than fees at a full service veterinary hospital. The Dumb Friends League will complete assessments of the Solutions – Veterinary Hospital client database on a regular basis to ensure services are being utilized by the intended audience. Should this review reveal that resources are not being respected appropriately, additional methods of restricting access will be considered.

Veterinarians will have volunteer opportunities at Solutions – Veterinary Hospital. The impact we can have will be greater with strong engagement from everyone. The need for dental procedures alone could keep an entire veterinary team busy endlessly—imagine the increased impact that could be made with volunteer veterinarians and veterinary technicians spending a few hours performing these procedures. There will also be the opportunity for veterinarians who perform procedures that Solutions – Veterinary Hospital does not provide to accept a predetermined number of referrals for care subsidized by that practice.