

Letters to the Editor

Embracing patient safety culture in veterinary medicine could save money and time for veterinary healthcare workers

Thank you for the Viewpoint article, "Patient safety culture is needed in veterinary medicine."¹ This article highlighted how embracing patient safety culture (PSC) could improve veterinary healthcare professionals' mental health and well-being. We agree with this important benefit and would like to comment on additional benefits of embracing PSC.

First, positive PSC would help reduce nonfatal injuries among veterinary healthcare workers. In 2022, the US veterinary profession had the second highest nonfatal injury incidence rate, 10.2 injuries per 100 full-time workers, compared to 2.5 in all industries (per 100 full-time workers).² Furthermore, the veterinary profession has had a nonfatal injury incidence rate in the top 5 among all private industries since at least 2013.² The majority of the injuries reported in our industry are animal bites, kicks, and scratches.^{3,4} Embracing PSC would include adopting low-stress handling to reduce animal anxiety while receiving veterinary care, making veterinary visits less stressful and safer for animals. Low-stress handling is also safer for veterinary staff because less anxious animals are less likely to bite, kick, or scratch.³

Additionally, adopting positive PSC could provide cost-

saving benefits for veterinary hospitals. Animal-related injuries can result in missed work, leaving workforces short-staffed. As with human healthcare, in veterinary medicine, occupational stress resulting from working while understaffed contributes to anxiety, depression, and burnout.⁵ The long-term impact of being short-staffed can lead to high employee turnover rates. Replacing employees who leave because they are experiencing anxiety, depression, and burnout costs veterinary practices money and time to recruit and train replacement employees.⁵ Furthermore, employees with the least experience in handling animals have been shown to sustain the most animal-related injuries,⁴ suggesting that a high employee turnover rate can further increase the risk for animal-related injuries among veterinary staff. Animal-related injuries, especially animal bites, lead to expensive workers' compensation costs. Finally, low-stress handling approaches may increase client retention, as the experience can be perceived as less stressful for the client.

As reported in the Viewpoint article, a PSC would not only benefit animals and improve patient outcomes but has the potential to save time and money while improving veterinary healthcare worker's mental health and well-being. The human healthcare profession is incorporating positive PSC alongside worker safety and health culture. The veterinary profession should consider including

worker safety and health culture in any PSC guidance.

The findings and conclusions in this report are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official position of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, CDC.

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