

Endoscopy Practice Management, Fee Structures, and Marketing

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KEYWORDS

• Endoscopy • Practice management • Fee structure • Marketing

KEY POINTS

- Entry-level endoscopy equipment for the exotic animal practitioner costs around \$15,000 (\$300-per-month lease) and represents a significant capital investment.
- An appropriate charging mechanism and fee structure is required to offset purchase, use, maintenance, and replacement costs.
- Marketing is important to promote endoscopy services to clients.

INTRODUCTION

Although the clinical virtues of diagnostic and surgical endoscopy in exotic animal practice are obvious, appropriate management, including a fiscally responsible fee structure, seems to be more challenging. The costs of a basic rigid endoscopy system for exotic animal practice can range between \$10,000 and \$20,000 and is not an insignificant capital investment; therefore, a suitable fee structure is required to help recoup costs associated with purchase (or lease), use, repair, replacement, technician time, and practice facilities. From discussions with various colleagues, it became obvious that there was widespread variation in endoscopy practice management. In addition, attendees at endoscopy courses frequently raised concerns regarding fee structures. Consequently, the author designed and circulated a short survey in the summer of 2014 in an attempt to obtain basic information on endoscopy practice management in Europe and the United States.

The author has nothing to disclose.

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SURVEY

An Internet-based survey was completed by 35 veterinarians, of which 21 were from the United States or Canada, 10 from Europe, 3 from Australia or New Zealand, and one from Africa. The general demographics of their respective practices varied considerably; however, overall, the mean exotic pet caseloads were avian 31%, reptile/amphibian 21%, small mammals 23%, fish 2%, with the remainder being domesticated animals. In the following sections, the author tries to indicate the general themes and commonalities and has provided numerical mean values where appropriate.

EQUIPMENT

The total purchase costs of endoscopy equipment was, on average, \$25,000; however, none of the respondents provided figures representing the recurring monthly costs associated with maintenance, repairs, and replacement. The basic 2.7-mm rigid endoscopy system can be purchased for around \$15,000 (considerably less on the second-hand market) or leased for approximately \$300 per month. Most survey respondents were experienced exotic animal endoscopists and had obviously expanded their endoscopy facilities from this basic starting point. Nevertheless, their continued preference for a 2.7-mm system was obvious, with most of the respondents (86%) owning this system. In addition, standard-definition cameras and monitors were twice as common (66%) compared with high-definition systems (34%), and xenon light sources were favored (60%) over cheaper halogen sources (34%). These differences probably represent a delay between new technological developments and the need to replace older items. The author expects high-definition and xenon to continue to gain in popularity in the future. Most veterinarians prefer to keep their equipment on a mobile endoscopy cart (or endoscopy tower). A complete list of endoscopy equipment and frequency of ownership can be found in [Table 1](#).

EQUIPMENT CHARGES AND ANCILLARY FEES

There was considerable variation in the charging mechanism for the set up and use of endoscopy equipment. Only half of the veterinarians surveyed specifically charged for the use of an endoscopy or operating room (\$150); sterilization, use, and cleaning of endoscopy equipment (\$122); or standard surgical pack including traditional instruments, drape, cap, mask, and gloves (\$71). Only 25% charged a specific fee for technician or nurse time (\$31). No doubt, many veterinarians that do not charge the aforementioned fees separately probably incorporate them into their endoscopy procedural fees. However, there was almost universal consistency in applying separate charges for anesthesia (\$184), histopathology (\$210), and microbiology (\$154).

ENDOSCOPY PROCEDURAL FEES

There was variation in how veterinarians actually charged for their endoscopy procedures. Approximately one-third of veterinarians used a tiered fee structure (eg, level 1–6, [Table 2](#)), whereas another third used an individual fee for every specific procedure (eg, reptile celioscopy, avian tracheoscopy, small mammal otoscopy, and so forth). The advantage of a tiered fee structure is that it provides flexibility to increase or decrease fees depending on difficulty, is simple and easily used by staff and doctors, and avoids numerous fee codes and individual descriptors. A major advantage of using detailed descriptors is that electronic medical record searches can be more targeted; however, this is at the expense of inputting considerably more data into a computerized accounting system.

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