

Aquatic Ambulatory Practice



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KEYWORDS

• Mobile • Ambulatory • Aquarium • Tank • Pond • Fish • Koi • Goldfish

KEY POINTS

- Ambulatory aquatic animal veterinary practice incorporates environmental assessments into clinical cases.
- Most diagnostics and procedures can be performed on aquatic patients in an ambulatory setting.
- Specific equipment for catching patients in an efficient and timely manner is required for the ambulatory practitioner.
- Treatment options must be considered with the client's involvement, comfort, and understanding.

INTRODUCTION

Aquatic ambulatory practice has the benefit of bringing veterinarians tank or pond side, allowing for a thorough evaluation of a patient's aquatic environment. Many larger fish, such as koi and sturgeon, are difficult to transport, thereby making an ambulatory component essential to any aquatic animal veterinary practice. The most important skill of the ambulatory practitioner is to be able to catch your intended patient quickly and efficiently to reduce stress and comorbidity. This can be accomplished with skill, patience, and nets of many sizes and purposes. Many of the common aquatic diagnostic techniques can be used pond or tank side. Coordination with another veterinary practice can extend the availability of veterinary services.

What Does It Take to Make an Ambulatory Aquatics Practice?

Establishing an ambulatory aquatic practice is relatively simple compared with a conventional small or large animal private practice. With its ambulatory nature, most practitioners will be able to work independently with a few additional tools. It is highly recommended that a Web site be created specific for the practice or add a page to your existing clinic Web site. Because of its novel nature, potential clients will rely on your Web site and clinic referrals to find your services.

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Staffing

Additional staffing is at the discretion of the practitioner. If a clinic is already established, all of your staffing for fielding calls and triaging will be in place. Make sure staff is aware of what information to collect from callers (**Box 1**). If practicing without any support staff, an answering service may be hired to collect the same set of information, or have potential clients fill out an online form. The complete summary can be e-mailed or faxed to the operations base. Set up a message on your work phone directing clients how to best contact you.

Pricing and Fee Structure

Pricing is at the discretion of the practitioner; however, keep in mind that this is a highly specialized, *ambulatory* practice. Providing service that is hard to find and on location should be considered a premium. There is a strong urge to underprice when getting started.

Fee structure can be set up as an hourly, à la carte, or package option. Hourly fees will include travel from the home base. À la carte and package options need to have a separate item for travel, which can be done by the minute or mile. The travel range of the veterinary practitioner will influence the scope of clients, so bear this in mind when setting your fee structure. Package options can include water quality testing and a few fish examinations under sedation, including capture. All treatments with this option can be à la carte. Re-check fees are usually at lower cost than first-time clients.

Equipment

Much of the veterinary equipment is the same as for small/large animal practice (eg, needles, syringes, drugs); however, an aquatic practitioner will require an assortment of nets and buckets to accommodate a wide range of fish sizes (1 inch to 24+ inches). Portable scales will be necessary to obtain fish weights and need to be water-resistant. A water quality test kit and microscope are suggested as part of a mobile

Box 1

Example of form for answering service to fill out and fax to our office

Date/Time:

Initials:

Type of call: Routine/Emergency/Question/Medication Request

Primary issue:

Name:

Phone:

E-mail:

Type of fish:

How many fish affected:

Duration of symptoms:

How big is the pond:

Last water change:

How much water was changed:

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