

# University Veterinary Specialists **TELEHEALTH CASE STUDY**



## Telemedicine Brings Specialty Care to Patients Without Extended Wait Times

**“When a pet is diagnosed with cancer, time is of the essence for both the pet and the owner.”**

*– Maureen Fallon, LVT, clinical manager, University Veterinary Specialists*

### **BUSINESS CHALLENGE**

Monthlong delays in scheduling oncology appointments for patients diagnosed with cancer. These delays caused both patient suffering and client distress.

### **SOLUTION**

University Veterinary Specialists' veterinarians began conducting virtual consultations with their oncologist, sharing medical records prior to video-based exams. Exams could be arranged quickly, bringing together the board-certified specialist with the primary care team to better support their patients and clients.

### **RESULTS**

Increased availability and shorter wait times for both new consultations and recheck appointments.

Better patient care, and less anxiety and distress for worried clients, including some who sought recommendations from the oncologist before making end-of-life decisions following emergency-room visits.

### **BACKGROUND**

University Veterinary Specialists (UVS) is a 24/7 emergency and specialty hospital in the Pittsburgh area whose oncology specialist, Dr. Guillermo Couto, was available on site only part time. His availability often meant delays in scheduling oncology appointments, with patients sometimes having to wait up to a month to see the specialist. UVS wanted to find a way to increase availability for oncology consultations while maintaining the high-quality specialty care provided by Dr. Couto. Their solution was to implement video-based consults to connect the primary care veterinarian, the patient and the client with Dr. Couto during hours when he could not be available in person in the clinic.



## IMPLEMENTATION

UVS staff decided to use a streaming video platform provided by VetNOW® to enable triangular consults involving both the primary-care veterinarian and the client. The UVS clinical manager, Maureen Fallon, LVT, started by mapping out the appointment workflow for Dr. Couto's in-person appointments with clients in the clinic. "I wanted to come up with a way to emulate that experience for the owners when the oncologist was traveling," she said.

"We were able to keep the Veterinarian-Client-Patient Relationship (VPCR) intact by utilizing our emergency veterinarians to perform physical exams and share any findings with the oncologist via the video appointment," Fallon said. "This was the launch of the very first triangle appointment. Once we established the VCPR, and maintained it during the consult, we were able to increase our appointment availability for our oncologist as well as the patients."

Another important task was collecting all patient records in one place for the oncologist to view remotely. This was possible through the streaming video platform, where clinic staff could upload medical records, reports, radiographs, ultrasound, and CT images. "This allowed Dr. Couto to view images as well as the records to have a complete picture of the case virtually, wherever he was located," said Fallon.

Just as he would do for an in-person consultation, Dr. Couto reviews a patient's records in advance of each consult. After discussing diagnosis and prognosis during the consultation, he shares available treatment options with the primary-care veterinarian and the patient's owner. The group then decides together which treatment option is best for the individual pet. The UVS staff can then carry out the treatment plan, and recheck appointments are scheduled either in person or through the same streaming video setup.

## THE IMPACT

"Telemedicine services provide our clients with quicker access to an oncologist," said Fallon. This has meant better patient care as well as increased revenue for the practice, as more clients have been able to continue turning to UVS – where they already have trusted relationships – throughout their pet's oncology journey. "Our clients have appreciated our efforts to find new technologically advanced ways to provide specialized care for their pets," Fallon said.

"Telemedicine allows for remote engagement of specialists when none are available in the area," added Dr. Couto. "That increases the number of patients that will eventually benefit from a specialist's input. Moreover, for some specialties such as oncology, it allows the family veterinarian to administer treatments, such as chemotherapy, in a more convenient setting for the family and patient, often at a significantly lower expense."

## For more information

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