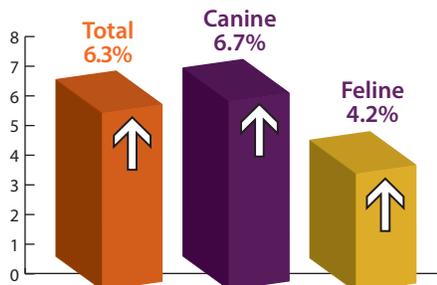


The Insider's Insight Benchmark Report is published by the Veterinary Hospital Managers Association (VHMA) on a monthly basis. The report tracks several key economic indicators to determine how VHMA member practices are performing, as well as results from VHMA surveys on issues impacting the profession. There are over 700 VHMA member practices who regularly contribute key economic indicator data. Data is representative of companion animal practices only.

September, 2019 vs. September, 2018

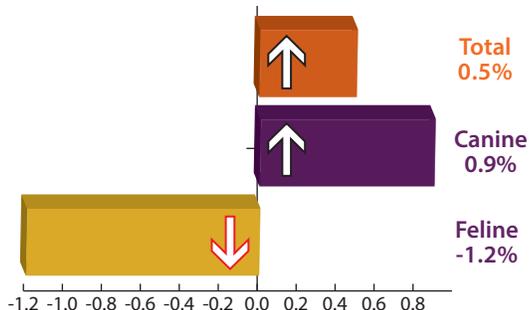
Revenue Growth
 September, 2019 compared to September, 2018



Revenue Growth

Companion animal practice revenue for the 700 VHMA practices included in this month's study showed strong growth of 6.3% from September, 2018 to September, 2019. There were the same number of workdays (24) in September of 2018 and 2019. Canine revenue growth was 6.7% and feline revenue growth was 4.2%. Year-to-date growth for 2019 is 4.4%; which is higher than the 2018 growth of 3.4%. This growth continues to be stronger than the overall growth seen in the US economy; the real US GDP growth was 3.1% for the first quarter of 2019 and 2.1% in the second quarter.

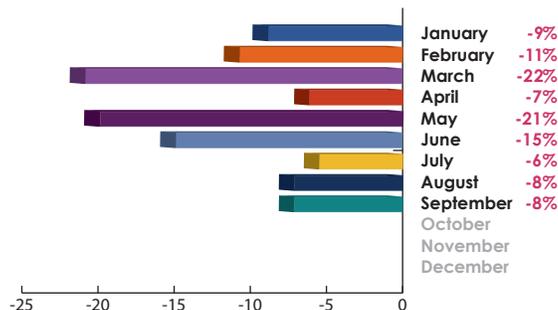
Patient Visits
 September, 2019 compared to September, 2018



Patient Visits

Total unique patient visits for the same period, September, 2019 compared to September, 2018 increased by 0.5% with canine visits up by 0.9% and feline visits down by 1.2%. As noted above, September of 2019 and 2018 had the same number of workdays. Total visits for year to date 2019 are down by 0.4% compared to a 0.6% decline in 2018. (Note that the term "visits" is defined as unique purchases of either products or services for an individual pet.)

New Client Growth
 September, 2019 compared to September, 2018



New Client Growth

New client numbers in September, 2019 compared to September, 2018 declined by 8%; the year-to-date 2019 decline is 12.3% compared to a 12.6% decline for the full year of 2018. This continues to be a discouraging trend as these numbers have declined almost every month of the last four years.

Remember that the above figures represent averages across all the practices in the study; in order to understand what is going on in YOUR practice, you need to look not only at what your revenue growth was during these months (and going forward) but also at the drivers of growth in YOUR practice such as changes in invoices, visits, ATC, fee increases, new clients and client retention. This will give you the information to make intelligent decisions about where to focus your time and efforts to increase growth.

Employee and Client Substance Abuse

by Karen E. Felsted, CPA, MS, DVM, CVPM, CVA PantheraT Veterinary Management Consulting

Typically, substance abuse in the workplace isn't just defined as drinking or using drugs on the job. The primary focus in the definition of substance abuse is the impairment of judgment, clarity and functioning at work regardless of when and where the alcohol or drugs were ingested. Substance abuse can occur with the ingestion of both legal and illegal drugs, controlled and non-controlled drugs and over-the-counter medications as well as with alcohol.

Dealing with substance abuse can be particularly difficult for small businesses because they don't have the expertise or resources to devote to the topic. Substance abusers often gravitate toward jobs in small businesses simply because they are less likely to be identified as having a problem.

Substance abuse can create serious problems in a veterinary workplace including accidents, errors in patient care and legal liability.

How big of an issue is this in veterinary medicine? The first two questions in this month's Insiders' Insights survey ask about the incidence of substance abuse in our profession. The first question asks: **"Have you personally ever had to deal with an employee with a suspected substance abuse problem?"**

As can be seen above, almost 70% of the respondents answered yes to this question; it's not a small issue in our profession.

Question 2 asked: **"Have you ever discovered an employee who exhibited behavior consistent with suspected substance abuse while on the job?"**

The responses were similar here with 68% answering yes.

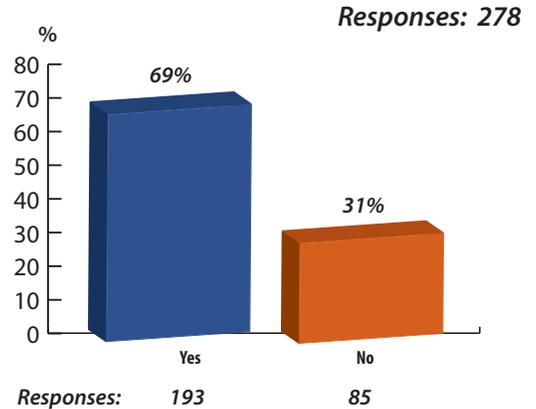
The next questions discuss what practices are doing to deal with the substance abuse issue.

Question 3 asks: **"Does your employee manual address how to deal with an employee found on the job to be impaired due to suspected substance abuse?"**

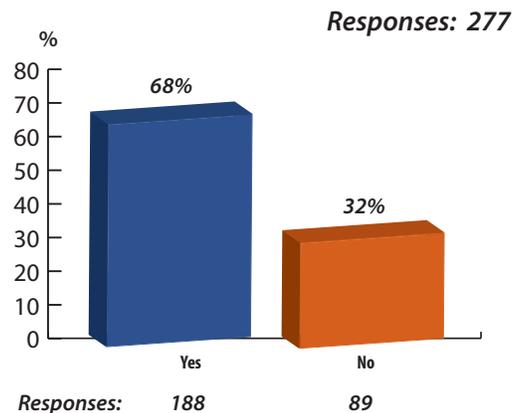
Creating a policy is a strong starting point and almost 90% of practices responding to this survey have done that.

While an employee's behavior may make you suspicious of substance abuse, drug testing is necessary to confirm it. Drug testing can also be used on a pre-employment basis.

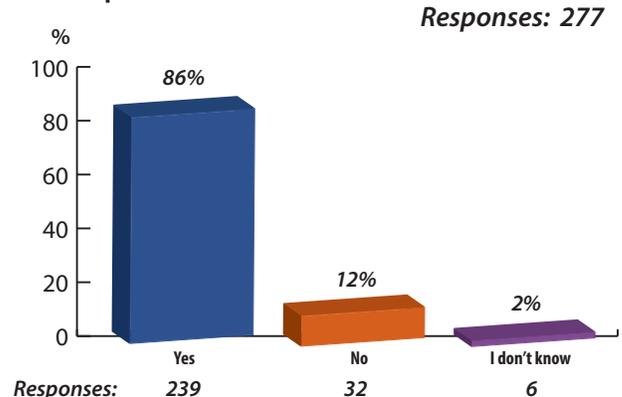
1. Have you personally ever had to deal with an employee with a suspected substance abuse problem?



2. Have you ever discovered an employee who exhibited behavior consistent with suspected substance abuse while on the job?



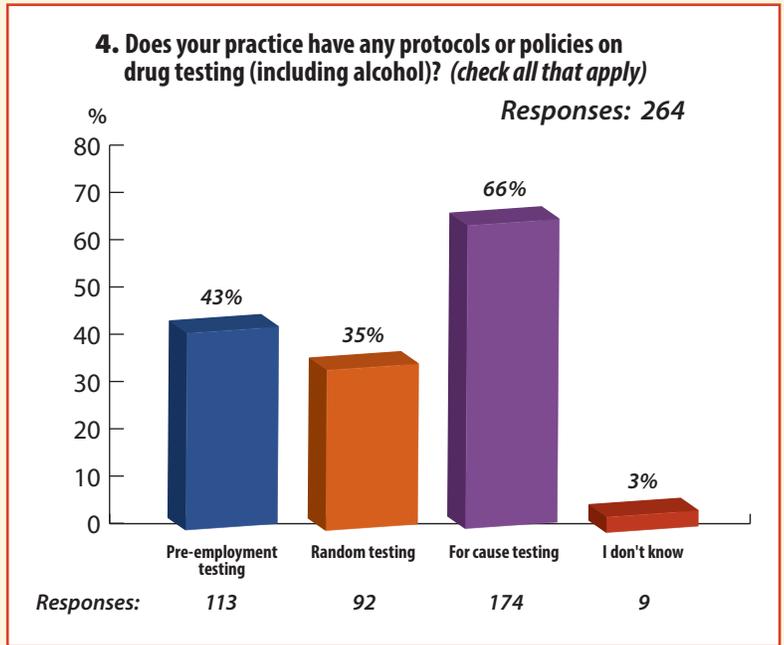
3. Does your employee manual address how to deal with an employee found on the job to be impaired due to suspected substance abuse?



Question 4 asks about this: **“Does your practice have any protocols or policies on drug testing (including alcohol)? (Check all that apply.)”**

While 2/3 of the responding practices have a policy in place regarding for-cause testing, less than 1/2 have a pre-employment or random testing policy. All of these policies are very important in an industry comprised mostly of small businesses and with easy access to drugs.

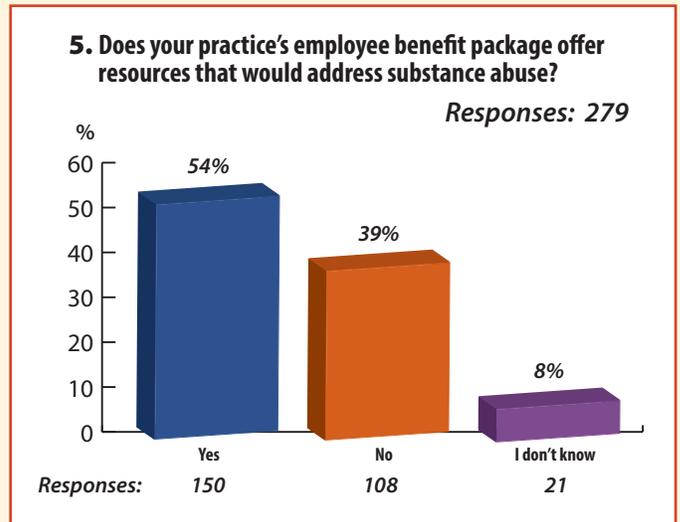
The vast majority of the answers in the “other” section specified their practice did not have any of these test policies although a few indicated they were working on them. One respondent mentioned that random testing is not allowed in their state.



The next question asks: **“Does your practice’s employee benefit package offer resources that would address substance abuse?”**

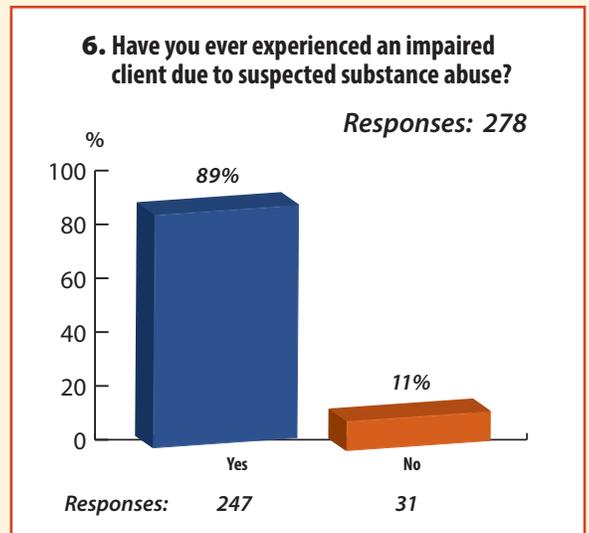
Just over 50% of the practices have such resources; typically this would be an EAP (employee assistance plan.)

Of course, employees aren’t the only ones who may have substance abuse problems and the last two questions ask about client abuse.



Question 6 asks: **“Have you ever experienced an impaired client due to suspected substance abuse?”**

Almost 90% of the respondents answered yes to this question; this is greater than the % of practices who have had to handle possibly impaired employees.



The last question asks: ***“Does your hospital have protocol or policies to address clients found to be impaired due to suspected substance abuse?”***

Unfortunately, most practices (over 70%) do not have such a policy in place.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (a division of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services) is an excellent resource for developing the policies and procedures necessary to create and keep a drug-free workplace. Steps include:

- Building a team
- Assessing your workplace
- Developing a policy
- Planning and implementing a program
- Evaluating your program
- Providing support

Information and a toolkit to help with establishing your drug-free workplace are available at the SAMHSA website: www.samhsa.gov/workplace

This website also includes information on federal and state laws related to this topic and tips for avoiding legal problems in this area.

See the December 2016 Insiders' Insights report for more information about EAPs in veterinary practices.

7. Does your hospital have protocol or policies to address clients found to be impaired due to suspected substance abuse?

