

Success Story:

Assessing Veterinary Clinic Usability for People with Mobility-Related Disabilities

Summary

The Community Health Environment Checklist (CHEC) is a tool for measuring the usability of spaces for people with disabilities. It was developed by disability researchers at Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri.

Since 2017, the Kansas DHP has facilitated CHEC assessments of usability for people with mobility-related disabilities at health departments, fitness facilities, and clinics for medical, behavioral, dental, and ocular health. In 2019, the DHP partnered with researchers at the Kansas State University (KSU) College of Veterinary Medicine to conduct a survey on Kansas veterinarians' understanding of usability and accessibility principles and to complete CHEC assessments of 10 veterinary hospitals. Dr. Kate KuKanich, KSU faculty, and Emma Winkley, a dual DVM/MPH degree student who pursued the project as part of her MPH, contributed extensively to this work.

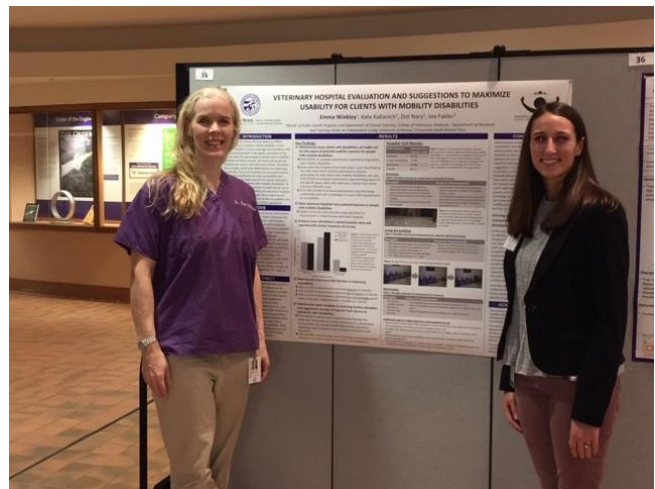
The collaboration culminated in a journal article titled "Improving Accessibility for Veterinary Clients with Mobility-Related Disabilities," which was published in the February 2020 *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association (JAVMA)*. The team also presented its findings at a statewide veterinary conference and at the Kansas Public Health Association annual conference. Dr. Kate KuKanich, a faculty member from the KSU College of Veterinary Medicine who worked on the project, successfully added accessibility topics to KSU's veterinary medicine curriculum.



Disability and Health Program kansans with disabilities can be healthy



Kansas DHP Consumer Advisory Board Member, Nena Murphy-Herd, and her service dog, Tor, check in at his veterinarian's hospital.



KuKanich (Left) and Winkley (Right) present their findings

Challenge

In 2017, the U.S. Census Bureau estimated that 21 million Americans had a mobility-related disability, and as the population of the United States ages, the number of people with mobility-related disabilities is likely to increase. Making veterinary hospitals usable for people with disabilities removes barriers to accessing health care for their pets and service animals, thereby promoting community participation and overall health.

However, veterinary hospitals, like many other public spaces, present barriers to use, such as lack of accessible parking stalls and the presence of entrance steps.

Although 93% of surveyed veterinarians from Kansas reported serving clients with mobility-related disabilities, only 38% of them reported being comfortable with their knowledge of how to make their practices more usable for clients with mobility-related disabilities.

Solution

By conducting CHEC assessments of veterinary hospitals, surveying veterinarians about their knowledge of practice usability, and disseminating findings through conference presentations and a journal article, the Kansas DHP and KSU College of Veterinary Medicine improved veterinarians' knowledge about what makes veterinary hospitals usable for clients with mobility-related disabilities.



A usable reception counter is at least 36" wide and no more than 36" high

Results

The survey measured veterinarians' understanding of accessibility and barriers to creating usable spaces for clients with mobility-related disabilities. In addition to not fully understanding what is required or recommended, veterinarians most often reported expense and lack of space as barriers to improving clinic usability. The survey also found that veterinarians were overwhelmingly receptive to learning more about ways to best serve clients with disabilities.

The ten veterinary hospitals scored well on the CHEC itself, earning an average score of 83 out of 100 possible points. Restrooms were the hospitals' least usable feature. Heavy entrance doors, gravel parking lots, high entrance thresholds, and high reception counters were also identified as areas for improvement. The assessors provided CHEC reports that specified how the veterinary hospitals could eliminate or minimize usability barriers.

The team's findings were published in the February 2020 issue of *JAVMA*, in an article titled "Improving Accessibility for Veterinary Clients with Mobility-Related Disabilities."

This article includes a document titled "Top 10 Ways to Maximize the Accessibility of Your Veterinary Practice for Clients with Mobility Disabilities" that presents useful information in a concise format.

The collaborating faculty member at KSU College of Veterinary Medicine, Dr. Kate KuKanich, also successfully added the topic of practice accessibility to the school's veterinary medicine curriculum. Kansas DHP's and KSU's collaboration on veterinary practice usability was a success because it generated knowledge about the accessibility of Kansas veterinary hospitals, and it provided insight into practitioners' knowledge of and interest in hospital usability for clients with mobility-related disabilities.

Future veterinary students will be educated about the importance of hospital accessibility.

It contributed to the field through an article on veterinary hospital usability that was published in *JAVMA*. Finally, it contributed to the education of future veterinarians by adding the topic of practice accessibility to the KSU College of Veterinary Medicine curriculum.



Removing a chair can mean the difference between an unusable and usable waiting room

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Sustaining Success

Improved awareness of Kansas veterinary hospital usability means that Kansans with mobility-related disabilities are likely to experience fewer barriers to using veterinary hospitals in their communities. Also, because practice accessibility has been added to the KSU College of Veterinary Medicine curriculum, future veterinary students will be educated about the importance of hospital accessibility. Finally, the addition of the *JAVMA* article to the veterinary medicine literature contributes information about this topic to the veterinary field beyond Kansas.



Lack of accessible parking creates barriers to veterinary care for people with mobility-related disabilities

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