



KANSAS STATE | Master of Public Health UNIVERSITY Interdisciplinary Program

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INTRODUCTION

According to the Census Bureau about 21 million Americans had a mobility-related disability in 2017. Rates of disability increase with age and therefore, with the forecasted growth in the aging population in the coming years the percentage of people with a mobility disability will likely increase. All these individuals are potential pet owners and veterinary clients. Therefore, two concepts need to be addressed by the veterinary community. First, how hospitals can be constructed or structurally modified to increase accessibility and usability. Second, awareness of the overall veterinary visit experience for clients with mobility disabilities. In order to begin to address these concepts we set out to gather baseline data on usability of veterinary hospitals in Kansas as well as gain insight about veterinarians' current knowledge of potential barriers to usability and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) regulations.

METHODS

A survey (n=59) was distributed to Kansas veterinarians online and at a local conference. Topics covered in the survey included demographics of the veterinarians, their experience with serving clients with disabilities, and their ability to self-assess their veterinary hospitals for accessibility and usability barriers. Two researchers (EW, KK) were certified by Community Health Environment Checklist for Mobility (CHEC-M) and used the CHEC standardized forms to evaluate 10 veterinary hospitals in Kansas. These forms were then scored by a blinded CHEC personnel. Each hospital received 3 section scores (entrance, using the building, and restroom) and an overall score. In addition to the CHEC report, an individualized report was created by our research team for each hospital describing strengths as well as short- and long-term suggestions for areas of improvement.

WHAT IS THE CHEC?

The Community Health Environment Checklist (CHEC) is a tool to measure how usable public spaces are for people with disabilities. It is **not** a comprehensive ADA assessment, but rather it is a usability tool focusing on key concerns identified by people with disabilities. The CHEC was developed by researchers at the Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis. This tool is used to assess public spaces like restaurants, stores, doctor's offices, and now, veterinary practices. CHEC assessors are trained to complete a standardized evaluation of measurable features in a site, which produces a score based on 100 as the optimum. CHEC evaluations can be posted online (checpoints.com) for public viewing as a tool when deciding which public places will be most usable for their needs.

80

VETERINARY HOSPITAL EVALUATION AND SUGGESTIONS TO MAXIMIZE USABILITY FOR CLIENTS WITH MOBILITY DISABILITIES

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RESULTS

Key Findings:

1) Veterinarians serve clients with disabilities, yet might not be fully aware of potential usability concerns for people with mobility disabilities.

* 93% (55/59) of surveyed veterinarians reported serving clients with mobility disabilities.

Every veterinary hospital visited had a least 1 area identified on the CHEC form which could be addressed to improve

accessibility for their clients with mobility disabilities, yet only 51% (30/59) of surveyed veterinarians reported being aware of any specific areas within their veterinary hospital that clients may have difficulty using.

Colly 38% (22/58) of surveyed veterinarians reported being comfortable with their knowledge of current ADA requirements for accessibility.

2) Most veterinary hospitals have potential barriers to people with mobility disabilities.

Tables 2-4 list the most common areas identified for improvement in visited Kansas veterinary hospitals.

3) Problem areas identified in visited hospitals were self reported with similar frequency via survey.



Figure 1. These three criteria (parking spaces, step-free entrance, and counter height) were assessed via hospital visits and survey self-assessment. The results suggest that if veterinarians are given specific accessibility requirements most can accurately selfassess their hospitals and become aware of potential areas for improvement.





Table

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Designated van-accessible Step-free entrance Adequate reception counter height parking space

Does the hospital have a(n)... 4) Veterinarians may encounter barriers in improving

accessibility.

* 36% (21/59) of veterinarians reported <u>expense</u> as a barrier 25% (15/59) of veterinarians reported lack of space as a barrier 20% (12/59) of veterinarians reported lack of knowledge about what is required, recommended, or helpful as a barrier

5) Veterinarians were receptive to receiving further education and suggestions on ways to improve their service to individuals with disabilities.

* 87% (48/55) of veterinarians reported that they feel the veterinary community as a whole (veterinarians, technicians, receptionists, etc.) would benefit from further education regarding ways to improve their service to individuals with disabilities.

* 93% (54/58) of veterinarians were receptive to receiving further education on ways to best serve clients with disabilities.

Hospital Visit Results:

CHEC Category	Average Score (100 pt. scale)
Entrance	89.18
Using the Building	91.46
Restrooms	53.60
Overall	83.71

Table 1. Overall, the veterinary hospitals assessed
 were found to be quite usable for clients with mobility disabilities. As many veterinary hospitals are located in older buildings with structural limitations, several common challenges were recognized. Strengths and areas for improvement amongst each of the three CHEC categories are displayed in the tables below.

Entrance:

Table 2. Strengths and areas for improvement in hospital entrances

Strengths

• 7/10 hospitals had signs designating adequately wide van-accessible parking spaces closest to the entrance (Figure 2). 9/10 had clear entrance routes free of level changes.

9/10 had adequately wide doorways (>32 inches wide)



Areas for Improvement

- 6/10 hospitals had heavy entrance doors. Aim for automatic or lighter user-friendly entrance doors
- 3/10 hospitals had gravel parking lots which can cause wear and tear on wheelchair tires. 4/10 hospitals had too high of entrance thresholds (>0.25").

Figure 2. To maximize usability veterinary hospitals should provide at least 1 paved van accessible parking space designated by a sign near the entrance on an accessible route. (Parking space + access aisle = at least 16' wide)

Using the building:

Table 3. Strengths and areas for improvement for using the veterinary hospitals.

engths	Areas for Improvement
 /10 had inviting lobbies with arrangements hat allow for space for a wheelchair to fit mongst a row of chairs (Figure 3). /10 had unobstructed and wide pathways 36" wide) and doorways (32" wide) 	 Only 1/10 of the hospitals had at least a portion of their reception counter of an accessible height (<36" from the floor).

Figure 3. Quick fix to creating a wheelchair-friendly lobby:

Restrooms:

4. Strengths and areas for improvement for restrooms.		
engths	Areas for Improvement	
/9 had two turdily mounted rab bars to llow for safe ransfers.	 4/9 hospitals had wide enough restroom/stall doors (>32") Only 5/9 hospitals had accessible paper towel/dryer height (<48" from floor). Only 5/9 hospitals had an accessible (non-vanity style) sink. 	

Additional ways to make veterinary visits positive for all:

• Have proactive and helpful staff available to assist clients who may need extra assistance into the building with their pet and throughout their visit.

• Consider the needs of a person who may benefit from a larger room to interact more

• Talk directly to clients with disabilities. Do not avoid eye contact or speak only to a client's companions.

• Use people first language (i.e. "person with a disability" instead of "disabled person" or "person who uses a wheelchair" rather than "wheelchair bound".



Disability and Health Program kansans with disabilities can be healthy

CONCLUSIONS

Veterinarians serve clients with mobility-related disabilities; therefore it is critical that veterinarians are aware of the accessibility and usability of their veterinary hospitals, to provide optimal service. Improving awareness of client needs in addition to providing practice-specific suggestions for improving and maintaining accessible veterinary hospitals is a positive step towards allowing clients to fully participate in their pet's veterinary care. Through education, the Kansas veterinary community can become more cognizant of potential physical barriers to people with mobility-related disabilities, including our increasing elderly population, and can make action plans for short and long-term modifications to their hospitals to remove barriers and improve access for all.

Moving toward a comprehensive assessment of accessibility and development of educational resources:

In the future, similar projects can be carried out to identify potential barriers in veterinary hospitals for people with other disabilities (i.e. low vision, hearing, cognitive, etc.). Continued work could lead to the development of a comprehensive veterinary hospital usability assessment as well as educational materials to encourage improvement of accessibility for all people with disabilities. Future collaborative work with ADA experts could result in increased educational materials to help veterinarians become more comfortable with their knowledge of ADA requirements.

Any sites that receive CHEC assessments are invited and encouraged to have their scores and forms posted online to the CHEC website for the benefit of people with disabilities.

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