

TRAVELING SURGEON OR REFERRAL TO A SURGERY CENTER? WHAT'S YOUR STANDARD OF CARE?

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Some might say we are treading a thin line by even approaching this subject. Truth is, we welcome the discussion. To help you understand a board-certified surgeon's perspective, we offer a variety of things to ponder as you determine what is best for your clinic, patient, and client. Of course, each case should be evaluated independently.

A Common Case, A Common Cause

A Labrador Retriever presents to you Monday morning with lameness and the client states their dog has not put much weight on the right hind leg for over a week. They thought with some rest it would heal on its own. Without any improvement, the pet owner brings it in to be checked out.

After a complete examination, it is clear the dog has ruptured its cranial cruciate ligament and normal mobility is obviously painful. Considered elective surgery, do you wait until the mobile surgeon can come in later in the week or do you refer the case to a specialist? A few things to consider:

1 How long will it be before the traveling surgeon can perform the surgery?

As a surgery specialty practice, we are staffed to accommodate and see most patients within 24-48 hours, or immediately in an emergent situation.

2 Is your facility and OR properly equipped for the surgery and any complications that could arise during or after the procedure?

Our OR is used strictly for surgery. It is cleaned daily and all personnel adhere to appropriate surgical standards (cap, mask, shoe covers, no food or drinks) at all times. It is separately climate controlled, with positive pressure laminar flow ventilation, has appropriate surgical plume evacuation for staff safety, special surgical lighting, and advanced monitoring equipment. Quality control measures are securely in place for sterilization of equipment and we have any surgical instrument imaginable if the need arises.

3 Do you have dedicated recovery space that is away from the general population of animals coming in and out of the hospital with various illnesses, infections, and contagious diseases?

Providing a quiet, safe, contained recovery area for each post-operative patient is essential to giving them the best chance at a speedy recovery while minimizing any potential complication (parvo, canine influenza, and other conditions that may easily be spread). As a surgery-based practice, our facility is typically not exposed to any of these potential contaminants.

4 Do you have qualified overnight personnel that can monitor the patient, keep them comfortable, and closely watch for any post-surgical complications?

Licensed and experienced surgical technicians monitor all VSRC hospitalized patients and appropriately administer medication, IV fluids, and provide supportive nursing care. The surgeon can be reached any time. The surgeon will evaluate the patient first thing the next morning and the client will be updated by the surgeon or knowledgeable staff.

5 If the patient will be monitored by the emergency service, does the pet need to be transferred at night and back again in the morning? Are there separate fees associated with the transfer?

Standard of care at VSRC is that all hospitalized patients receive continuous care and monitoring by qualified personnel at our facility. There is no need to transfer the patient for aftercare unless it is a weekend emergency. There is no additional or separate fee as hospitalization is part of the surgical treatment plan.

6 How much hand-holding and time will the client need throughout the process?

The board-certified surgeon assumes the case and will be responsible for all client communication before, during, and after the procedure. Clients are able to call our office with any concerns after surgery. Summary reports are sent to you promptly, often within 24 hours of the procedure.

7 Does the traveling surgeon bring staff with them or will you need to forfeit one of your team for the day or have someone pull double duty?

We are staffed for maximum coverage 24 hours a day and we have ample supplies on-hand so your practice inventory, over time or extra help is not required.

8 What is in the best interest of the pet in terms of potential for further injury, discomfort, and timeliness of treatment?

We believe a timely referral to a specialist is the best option as it meets the highest standard of care. Sure, a traveling surgeon could perform the surgery in a few days, and all could go off without a hitch. But an even better option, we believe, is referral to a surgical specialist who works out of a facility built for surgery for all these reasons. We invite you to make VSRC your choice for referral and we will gladly provide the kind of care and service that will make you and your client happy you did.

We always welcome your calls to discuss individual cases and we'll help you decide if a case can stay in-house or if it warrants a referral. As partners to primary care veterinarians, we understand the economics as well as the dynamic of the client all contribute to your decision, and we respect that. We hope that, in the interest of each patient, you feel comfortable turning to us when the benefits for referral outweigh the risks. True partners have each other's best interest in mind. And we're here to help with everything from routine procedures to complicated situations, and even reparative scenarios. It's part of our code of conduct, our commitment to the profession, the pets we care for, and the partners we serve.

We hope this will help you decide which route to take with the next patient that presents a surgical challenge. For more information on the collaborative benefits of working closely with specialists, refer to the AAHA Referral Guidelines recently updated and published in *TRENDS* Magazine.





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