

# Lasers Financially Therapeutic, Too

By Dennis Arp  
For Veterinary Practice News

Capital equipment with a five-figure price tag isn't a likely candidate for an impulse buy. Which is why Don Nunn, DVM, pondered, contemplated and considered for, oh, almost two whole hours before he added a Class IV laser to his arsenal of therapies.

"I wasn't looking for it, but it caught my attention in the exhibit hall," Dr. Nunn says of his introduction to laser therapy at a veterinary conference in January. "Now I'm using it every single day."

Nunn, owner-operator of Integrity Animal Hospital in Kingsland, Ga., echoes sentiments voiced by many of his laser-using contemporaries. The primary "wow" factor is the therapy's impact on the lives of patients and clients.

"The feedback I get lets me know it's nothing short of miraculous," Nunn says. "It just adds another dimension to the management of pain."

Nunn and others also enjoy



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the benefits of wow factor No. 2: The therapeutic laser can have a powerful effect on the economics of a practice.

Nunn purchased LiteCure's Companion Therapy Laser for his two-doctor small-animal practice without shopping around or doing a cost-benefit analysis.

The case made by the LiteCure representative was compelling enough to win him over.

Now, he says, he's using it on just about every kind of musculoskeletal pain, from sprains and

strains to chronic hip dysplasia, as well as for edema and snakebite and to promote healing and control post-surgical pain.

In fact, it's easier for Nunn to list his non-laser cases: never on tumors, testes or eyes. "Anything else is fair game," he says. "And it's been remarkable the changes we've seen."

Among his most recent applications are to treat chronic staph infections and severe gingivitis in cats.

"One patient I saw yesterday

had struggled with a staph infection, then we used laser therapy two to three months ago, and she hasn't been on meds since," Nunn says. "She had a little itching, so she was back in for a follow-up treatment, but otherwise there have been no flare-ups."

Stories such as this fuel word-of-mouth promotion, Nunn says.

"We're in a semi-rural area, and we are by no means the highest-priced clinic in the area," he notes. "We charge less than we have heard recommended (\$20 to \$40 per session, depending on the treatment plan).

"But we've billed out more than 500 sessions, and if we apply all of our charges to paying for the machine, it means we have billed out as much as the unit cost in the nine months since we got it."

Like Nunn, Bob Cohn, DVM, of North Laurel Animal Hospital in Laurel, Md., has had his Class IV Companion

laser since January. And he, too, is using it to treat everything from acute injuries to minor swelling, with a success rate of about 90 percent.

He did get more than one quote and tested more than one laser before buying. He also looked at the number of cases sent home with prescription pain relievers as well as the number of patients already on joint supplements.

"We figured that if we had 30 percent (opt for therapeutic laser treatment), we could pay for the machine in probably 10 months of ownership," Dr. Cohn relates. "And so far, those figures are not too far off."

He says the first year of lease payments was reached in the first 30 days after he got the laser.

Cohn says it's not hard to convince clients of the benefits of laser therapy. They like that it's noninvasive and that the hospital allows them to be with patients during treatment, so they can see that it's safe.

Often it's the patients who make the best pitch. "A lot of dogs tug to come in because they know they're going to feel better when they go out," Cohn says. "We don't promote it as a magic

bullet, and we try to be really specific about what we're treating and why. We also caution that many animals will take four treatments to see the benefits."

Cohn offers a six-treatment plan, targeting chronic pain cases, for \$265 to \$285, with a high approval rate. "When people hear the word 'pain,' they're eager to find effective treatment," he says.

For Cohn and Nunn, offering laser therapy differentiates their practices from almost all others in their area, although neither practice has done much marketing beyond highlighting the laser on a website.

Often the biggest promotional point for clients is that laser ther-

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Bob Cohn, DVM

apy offers a pain-control alternative to surgery or medications, says Brian Pryor, Ph.D., president of LiteCure.

"Clients like it when they have options, especially when there's a downturn in the economy," Dr. Pryor says.

From the practitioner's perspective, he notes that adding a therapy is different from adding other devices. "From Day 1, a therapy can provide return on investment," he says.

For practitioners, LiteCure offers marketing support to get the word out about their newest technology, says Dean Francis, LiteCure national sales manager, Companion Veterinary Division.

As an example, if the practice provides names and addresses, LiteCure mails out postcards to spread the word that a practice has added an innovative therapeutic modality.

"Once the veterinarian is comfortable with the laser, we also try to help out with contacting the local media," Francis says.

However, Francis allows, word of mouth is still the best marketing tool.

"Good news spreads quickest at Wendy's and the beauty shop," he says. ●

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