LOGAN NESER: Hello! I am here today with Dr. Strong to discuss the integration of shelter, medical, and managment teams for a collaborative healthcare program. Dr. Strong served as a senior manager at Wake County Animal Center in Raleigh, North Carolina where she supervised 23 medical and operational staff. She has since transitioned to her new role as the Director of Orange County Animal Services in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Thank you so much for joining us today!

SANDRA STRONG: Thank you for having me!

LOGAN: Yes, so during your career you have served as a shelter veterinarian and as a shelter director. We have some questions today to kind of get some insights into the role of each position and working together to create collaborative healthcare programs for the shelter. Our first question is what should shelter veterinarians understand about the role and responsibilities of directors in carrying out the mission and goals of the shelter?

STRONG: That’s a really good question and I’m glad that we’re talking about this because it is an area between, I think, directors and veterinarians that sometimes there are some rocky interactions. And I think it does come from two different perspectives on the overall shelter management and what’s going on in the shelter. The first thing I would say is that veterinarians, we need to know clear goals and expectations because each program is so unique, right? And so, I would recommend that we have a regular meeting with the director, understand what are the goals, what are the expectations for the veterinary health program, and also what are the resources, what’s our budget? Data discussions go a long way to clear up any confusion within that. And so that’s what I would say, as veterinarians, we’re trained as leaders, but we’re also very clinically oriented, and shelter medicine is a whole ‘nother, species so to say, because we’re doing individual animal care along with population health. I think that we really just need to know the clear guidelines, the resources, and what our mission and goals are.

LOGAN: What do you think directors should understand about the role and responsibilities of veterinarians in contributing to the mission and goals of the shelters?

STRONG: Another really great question. As I said, I think as veterinarians, we’re really hard-core trained to diagnose, treat, and relieve animal suffering and so I think directors need to understand that. We are scientists at the core and so there needs to be a lot of discussion between, again, it just goes back to expectations and budget. And I think the other thing directors really need to understand about veterinarians is that we are natural leaders. We come into this role as veterinary medicine and we are good at making decisions, we are used to making decisions and being in charge of areas and I think the more power, I don’t know if power is the right word, or the ability, empowering veterinarians to make decisions that can impact the shelter and make it better. And that’s just collaboration. (inaudible) We’d want to see more collaboration between the director, the management team, I think having veterinarians be part of the management team is super helpful for shelters and the management team to have that cohesive unit working together and understanding the data, the goals, and the resources.

LOGAN: For the final question, do you have a couple of pro tips for newly minted shelter veterinarians that would promote a collaborative relationship with the shelter director and management team?

STRONG: Yes. Those kind of circle back into what we’ve already discussed.

LOGAN: Yes

STRONG: And my pro tips for veterinarians and new veterinarians coming into the shelter is understand what type of organization you’re working for. Are you limit admission non-profit and you’re-- and then it gets back to understanding clear goals and your mission is to really help each individual animal without much of a budget. And I would say that’s rare, usually we still have a budget and we have to fall within. And so, as a new veterinarian, definitely meet with the director, find out if you can be part of those management meetings so that you can better understand the mission and resources or even as you’re coming into a shelter and being (hired?), ask to be part of the management team. I think veterinarians, we get frustrated because we know how to, we know a lot of what needs to be done but maybe we aren’t empowered to make those changes. That’s something I would recommend. Regular check-ins with the director and learn to celebrate the successes. Directors don’t always know what’s happening in the clinic or down in the trenches of teams and so we, there’s lots of challenges, we know that in sheltering, but also don’t forget to celebrate the successes and bring that to light. Because as a shelter veterinarian, I’ve noticed working sometimes we’re doing a lot of good, but we don’t always take the time to relay that information outwards to the management team or director.

LOGAN: Yeah, those are really great tips. Thank you so much. I think that our students will appreciate that, especially celebrating the successes. I think we don’t do enough of that.

STRONG: Right, because there’s always challenges because of the nature of the work that we do, and that helps our teams too. “Look we did this, this and this. Yes, we still need to work on this area but look at how far we’ve come”. I think, again, that goes back to being in the science world. We’re trained to be critical and look at what needs fixing, but remember to circle back and be optimistic and positive with your team.