



## Atlantic Street Veterinary Hospital Pet Emergency Center

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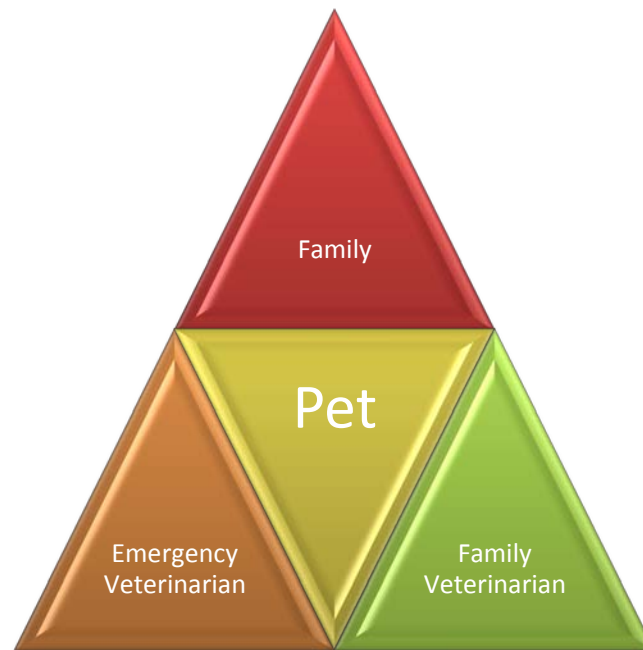
### *What to expect at the emergency hospital*

Trying to decide whether we need to take our pets to the emergency veterinarian is never an easy choice. First off, this is not a planned event and therefore rarely prepared for – often leading to a highly emotional and stressful situation! Adding to the stress are the following questions:

1. Is this an emergency?
2. What should I expect?
3. How much is it going to cost?

Prior to responding directly to these questions, let's look at the role of the emergency veterinarian.

A concept termed the "Triangle of Care" best illustrates the team approach to providing medical care. Within the triangle, everyone plays an important role in the care of the pet.



Triangle of Care concept adapted from Katherine Dobbs, RVT, CPVM, PHR - AVMA Conference 2010 Atlanta GA

The role of an emergency veterinarian is to be available in times of need when the family veterinarian is unavailable or unable to provide the specific type of care. Additionally, the emergency veterinarian plays a supportive role in making sure that the family and family veterinarian are well informed and actively participating in the decisions and care of the pet.

Times when the emergency veterinarian is involved

- After business hours
- When the family veterinarian is unable to see the pet - to include regular business hours
- Pet needing such as 24 hour care and or special monitoring equipment – typically as a transfer patient from the family veterinarian

## Expectations

### **Is this an emergency? (Defining an emergency as “the pet needs to be seen right away”).**

The emergency veterinarian's first goal is to help guide you through the decision-making process. ([see our web site for typical emergencies](#)). In many cases the answer is not simple. Legally, medical advice cannot be given without first getting a complete patient history and examination. An emergency is not necessarily a “life-threatening condition” but rather a personal choice of the family to address a concern for the pet's comfort in a more timely manner. Based on our years of experience, it is clear that in most cases the family is the best judge of the pet's needs. Now is the pet sick or injured “enough” to be seen right away? Well, ultimately that decision must always be made by the family.

If the decision is made to come to the emergency hospital:

1. Provide an estimated time of arrival
2. Bring all medications the pet is currently taking
3. Copy of medical records are always helpful
4. If suspect toxin exposure, bring the container (label of active ingredients)
5. Vomiting/diarrhea – small sample in a ziplock bag
6. Alert the staff if pet is having problems breathing
7. If pet is not able to walk and too large to carry, let the staff know so they can assist with a gurney

### **What should I expect?**

- **Upon arrival:** Often times, the emergency staff is working with the other pets (patients) in the hospital. So, it is not uncommon to arrive only to find a locked door or absence of a receptionist to greet you. An intercom or door alarm will alert staff to your arrival and they will respond to greet you in the lobby just as soon as possible (usually within a minute of your arrival).
- **Sick until proven well:** The needs of the pet are first and foremost in the approach and service provided by the emergency veterinarian. This often means focus is on the pet and their problems, with a more “business-like” approach and manner. Occasionally the client feels left out, this is purely unintentional. Please let staff know if your needs are not being met – you can expect to receive the proper attention to help you through this emotional and stressful time.
- **Triage:** There may be delays in being seen or speaking to the doctor. Staff member will come to the lobby to check important vital signs. If any question or concern, the pet will be taken to the treatment area where additional staff and the doctor are available to begin supportive care.
- **Medical History and Physical Examination:** All care decisions are dependent on getting complete information of your pet's current condition as well as any other medical condition (in most situations this is the first contact with you and your pet – hence more time consuming). Following the History and Physical, the doctor will detail what they believe is the primary concerns and then present you with a Treatment Plan which outlines an ideal plan for care.
- **Communication:** It is the goal to keep the family and family veterinarian fully aware of the condition of the pet as well as provide support for making medical decisions. Electronic Medical Records are available for the family veterinarian to review as well as a referral letter provided when the pet has been released from the hospital. For the family, staff will review home care and written instruction.

**How much is it going to cost?** - The cost of service at emergency hospitals is typically higher than at the family veterinarian. Illness and injuries are almost always more expensive to manage than providing preventative care. Factors that lead to higher costs are:

1. Staffing needs for 24/7 coverage as well as having emergency trained staff and doctors
2. Equipment costs – emergencies require immediate access to special instruments and testing tools that one might not find at the family veterinarian's office

In discussing cost for services, the staff will present the Treatment Plan which outlines the options (based on experience and medical knowledge) for addressing the medical condition or injury. In cases where options or alternatives are possible, the doctor and staff will address the risks vs benefits in assisting the family in making decisions.