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Production Isn't the Only Thing That Matters in Compensation

BY STEPHANIE GOSS
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Veterinarians have been debating compensation models for years, but recently the conversation around ProSal has gotten louder. In a recent Today's Veterinary Business column, Dr. Stacey Santi raised thoughtful concerns about ProSal. Her reflections touched on the tension between practicing great medicine and feeling like every decision carries financial weight.

If you've ever caught yourself mentally calculating production during an appointment, you know exactly what Dr. Santi is talking about. And honestly? I get it. I was paid on production as a technician, and part of me liked it. Growing up a competitive tomboy with three sports-obsessed brothers, I thrive in environments that push me to work harder, think more critically, and look at the whole patient, not just the presenting problem.

Veterinary medicine is one of the only professions where we expect people to be deeply compassionate caregivers and quietly brilliant business operators, often without teaching them how to do the second part.

Dr. Santi isn't wrong to raise the concern. Her article highlights several issues our profession should take seriously. But I don't think ProSal itself is the villain in this story. The real issue is

simpler and harder at the same time: Our compensation systems often reward the wrong things.

Compensation systems don't just pay people. They teach people what matters.

Here's the uncomfortable truth: Most veterinarians don't hate production pay. They hate feeling like production is the only thing anyone notices. Recognition matters. Mentoring, collaboration, emotional labor, and the quiet leadership that keeps hospitals running deserve to be noticed, too.

The Balancing Act of Veterinary Medicine

Veterinary medicine lives at an uncomfortable intersection. We are caregivers. We are scientists. And, whether we like it or not, we are business operators. Sometimes those identities pull against each other. Compensation models like ProSal were originally designed to balance two competing realities: Veterinarians deserve financial stability, and veterinary hospitals need revenue to survive. On paper, that balance makes sense.

Where things start to wobble is when production becomes the only metric that matters. When a system rewards only one behavior, it quietly teaches people that everything else is secondary.

That lesson might not be intentional. But it is powerful.

The Work Production Reports Don't Capture

Every hospital has that doctor. The one who stays late to help a technician master anesthesia monitoring. The one who sits with a grieving client after a euthanasia because the client just can't leave yet. The one who mentors new graduates through the moments when imposter syndrome hits hardest.

Those contributions rarely show up on a production report, yet they are the backbone of strong hospitals. They build trust with clients. They strengthen teams. They create cultures where people want to stay. If our compensation systems ignore those contributions, we shouldn't be surprised when doctors begin to feel like production is the only thing leadership truly values.



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Not because anyone said it. Because the system did.

When ProSal Works

ProSal exists for good reasons. When structured thoughtfully, it can offer veterinarians:

- ▶ **Stability:** A base salary protects doctors from the normal fluctuations of hospital caseload and provides financial predictability.
- ▶ **Recognition:** Production rewards doctors who contribute to the financial health and growth of the practice.
- ▶ **Shared success:** When the hospital performs well, the people creating that success benefit too.

In theory, this balance allows veterinarians to focus on practicing good medicine while also recognizing the financial realities of running a hospital. But when transparency disappears, credit sharing becomes murky, or expectations become unrealistic, the system begins to feel less like recognition and more like pressure. And pressure rarely produces the culture we hope to build.

A Better Question

Perhaps the real question isn't whether ProSal works; it's this: What behaviors should veterinary compensation reward? Because the list includes more than revenue. Great hospitals are built by doctors who:

- ▶ Mentor and collaborate across the entire team.
- ▶ Communicate clearly with clients.
- ▶ Practice thoughtful, spectrum-of-care medicine.
- ▶ Support their teams during difficult cases.
- ▶ Build trust within their local communities.

Production is only one piece of that equation. The more intentional we become about compensation design, the



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more opportunities we have to reinforce the behaviors that make veterinary medicine sustainable for people and businesses.

Culture Will Always Beat the Spreadsheet

One of the most fascinating things about compensation systems is how differently they function depending on the culture surrounding them. I've seen this play out firsthand. I've worked in two hospitals using almost identical ProSal structures. Same percentage. Same base salary philosophy. Same production calculations. On paper, the systems were nearly clones.

In one hospital, the doctors collaborated constantly. Cases were shared freely. When something complicated walked in the door, the conversation sounded like, "Hey, can you take a look at this with me?" Production existed in the system, but it didn't dominate the culture. In the other hospital, the same compensation structure produced something very different. Doctors guarded appointments. Collaboration dropped. Production became the quiet scoreboard running in everyone's heads.

The formula didn't change. The leadership did.

Compensation systems don't exist in a vacuum. They operate inside cultures shaped by transparency, expectations, and trust. When leaders are open about finances, fair about credit sharing, and clear about what behaviors matter, production-based systems can function as one piece of a healthy structure. Without those things, even the best-designed compensation model will struggle. Because culture will always shape how the spreadsheet is experienced by the people living inside it.

The Goal Isn't More Production

The goal of compensation shouldn't be maximizing production. The goal should be building sustainable hospitals where veterinary teams can thrive and:

- ▶ Doctors feel valued.
- ▶ Technicians and support staff feel supported.
- ▶ Clients experience trust.
- ▶ Leadership can afford the staff, equipment, and training necessary to practice excellent medicine.

In those environments, financial health supports clinical excellence rather than competing with it. If ProSal is designed thoughtfully, it can absolutely be part of that ecosystem. But the model alone won't get us there. That work belongs to leadership.

The Opportunity in This Conversation

The renewed debate around compensation is a healthy one for veterinary medicine. It's forcing us to look closely at the systems we've inherited and ask whether they still serve the profession we want to build. Dr. Santi's perspective adds an important voice to that conversation. Perhaps the

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takeaway isn't that ProSal should disappear. Perhaps the takeaway is that our compensation systems deserve the same level of thoughtful design we expect in every other part of veterinary medicine.

When incentives align with the values we say we hold as a profession, something powerful happens. The business works. The teams stay. The medicine gets better. And that's a future worth building for the people, practices, and patients who depend on us as leaders.

STEPHANIE GOSS has spent over 25 years helping veterinary teams navigate the messy middle of leadership so they can build strong cultures and grow people. She is the CEO of PrideVMC, where she works to create a safer, better, and more empowered world for the veterinary LGBTQ+ community and its allies.

A Large Animal Practice's Case for Production Pay

BY ALAN MARTENS, DVM
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After reading Dr. Stacey Santi's article, "The Shortcomings of Production Pay," I had to weigh in on our practice's experience. We are a large animal — primarily dairy — practice located in central Wisconsin. There are nine partners. The senior partner — myself — has ownership of 1/25, and all the other partners are 3/25 owners.

The article identified a number of shortcomings, but I think it is important to list the positives we have experienced during the past five years. On balance, our practice has grown significantly by using production pay, and it has led to a more team-like atmosphere. Some highlights:

- ▶ All partners and associates are treated the same. Partners split profits periodically. Associates have production reduced by 20% to cover 6% employer-guaranteed retirement contributions, partnership contributions to Social Security and Medicare, workers' compensation,

When associates move to production pay, their billing time and accuracy always improve.

medical insurance, and other employment costs that partners have to cover 100% after they take production pay.

- ▶ On-call work is subsidized with a stipend for a night or weekend. About half the nights, there are no emergencies, but there is still a payment. If older partners want to trade or if younger vets want to do extra emergencies, they get paid. There is no "You owe me a night." The practice loses money on emergency services but retains clients. The veterinarian is also paid production for the services provided during emergencies.
- ▶ If a veterinarian goes to an on-farm breakfast, or a school or 4-H club to present, they are paid by the practice for their time. We also pay an extra stipend for taking a veterinary student with you for a day. You are expected to slow down and invest time in that student.
- ▶ We pay for vacation, provided no calls are run that day, with no exceptions.
- ▶ We reimburse for continuing education time. If you go to a meeting, or you do it online in the evening, it is your choice; the pay is based on CE credits obtained.
- ▶ When associates move to production pay, their billing time and accuracy always improve.
- ▶ Before production pay, some veterinarians would disappear for extended periods. This no longer happens.
- ▶ Payment requires an elaborate spreadsheet program and a detailed general ledger, but it can be run in two hours each month.

Like every situation, there are downsides to production pay. But for our practice, the pros far outweigh the cons.

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THE CONVERSATION STARTER

Read Off the Record columnist Dr. Stacey Santi's article, "The Shortcomings of Production Pay," in the February/March 2026 issue of Today's Veterinary Business: go.navc.com/4lb2Xvl.