

PRACTICE PROFILES



Deep-tissue laser therapy

By Michelle O'Neal

THIS PROFIT CENTER EMPOWERS YOU TO PROVIDE ADVANCED CARE AND MARKET YOUR PRACTICE AS A STATE-OF-THE-ART FACILITY.

When Tim Montague, DVM, co-owner of Eads Animal Hospital in Eads, Tenn., invested in a laser-therapy unit in early 2006, he couldn't imagine the multitude of benefits it would provide. "Deep-tissue laser therapy was in its infancy. Our uses for and aptitude with it developed over time," he says. Now Montague and his team often use laser therapy as the first treatment option for pain and inflammation rather than as a last resort. In two and one-half years, the practice has also learned that laser therapy is more than a fancy tool to manage pain. Technician manager Jennifer Morton says, "We use deep-tissue laser therapy to speed healing in everything... dental procedures, hot spots, and orthopedic surgery, among others. There are very few cases where we don't see improvement."

The beginning

Both Drs. Tim and Sandy Montague were familiar with surgery lasers, which they had purchased and used at separate practices. In December 2007 the Eads practice purchased a six-watt companion-animal LiteCure CTL-6 laser and easily trained their team to use it. In the first six months of 2008, the practice generated

\$11,285 thanks to laser therapy. "And I still think that we don't use it enough," says Dr. Montague.

Chief applications

"Anything inflammatory is fair game. If you've got pain, swelling, or healing, you've got a use for laser therapy," says Dr. Montague. Deep-tissue laser therapy has been used by Eads Animal Hospital and other practices to manage:

- osteoarthritis
- degenerative joint and disk disease
- hip dysplasia
- dermatologic disorders (e.g., hot spots, interdigital dermatitis, acral lick granuloma)
- acute and chronic otitis
- periodontal disease (e.g., feline stomatitis)
- post-operative healing (e.g., to treat incision pain)

Meet the team

Practice name: Eads Animal Hospital; Eads, Tenn.

Veterinarians: Drs. Tim Montague, Sandy Montague, Traci Dixon, and Jennifer Epling

Management: an office manager, business manager, technician manager, and kennel manager

Other team members: six technicians, five receptionists, three groomers, and three kennel assistants

Client base: about 5,040 active clients

Patient make-up: about 70% canine and 30% feline

Annual gross revenue: \$1.8 million

“But lasers sound scary...”

Jennifer Morton, technician manager at Eads Animal Hospital in Eads, Tenn., knows that some pet owners cringe when you recommend laser therapy. For some clients, lasers are still in the realm of science fiction, while others envision beams that burn or cut. To ease clients' minds, Morton uses a two-prong strategy. She first explains that deep-tissue laser therapy is noninvasive. Then she likens it to a spa treatment for pets. “Dogs and cats remain calm and comfortable,” she says. “Most enjoy it because they feel better right away.” Then Eads team members wait for clients to be wowed by the immediate pay-offs. “Many pets with mysterious sprains or limps hobble in on three legs and walk out on four,” says Dr. Tim Montague, co-owner of the practice. “We’ve seen lame patients jump into their owners’ laps after one treatment.” Now that’s instant gratification and powerful marketing.

before the patient wakes up)

- acute traumas (*e.g.*, sprains or limps without radiographic changes or torn ligaments)
- palliative pain relief.

Benefits for your patients

The Eads practice has seen firsthand how therapeutic lasers allow their team to deliver state-of-the-art medicine. Laser therapy improves patient care because it:

- is an effective drug-free treatment for pain and inflammation
- is extremely well tolerated by pets
- has no known side effects
- may decrease the need for surgery and medication
- reduces healing time
- requires no sedation or clipping
- quick to administer (approximately 3 to 6 minutes per site).

For the most part, Eads Animal Hospital uses laser therapy as an adjunct to other therapies. They’ve witnessed how treatments can reduce the dosage and duration of nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug therapy. Chronic disorders such as hip dysplasia are managed with aggressive treatments at first and then scaled back to maintenance programs lasting 20 to 40 days. “We let the pet tell us how much she needs,” Dr. Montague says.

Laser therapy can also give owners the gift of quality time with a beloved, terminally-ill pet. Dr. Montague recommended laser therapy for a dog with terminal bone cancer that had spread to his lungs and skin. Treatments

helped alleviate the pain and edema around the tumor making the dog more comfortable in its final months.

Perks for your practice

The benefits of laser therapy reach beyond better pain management and healing for your patients. The Eads Animal Hospital sees these positive business-related changes at their practice because they utilize laser therapy:

- It introduces a profit center that doesn’t require a veterinarian.
- The pre-set protocols make it easy to administer.
- Technicians trained to perform laser therapy feel empowered and more valuable to the practice.
- Clients prepay for treatment, and packages keep them coming back.
- It identifies the practice as a state-of-the-art facility.

Technician manager Jennifer Morton also touts laser therapy’s user-friendly qualities. “The LiteCure unit is simple to use, easy to clean, requires little upkeep, and the procedures are quick,” she says.

Scheduling

Morton stresses the importance of scheduling laser-therapy appointments—not squeezing them in—even though they can take only a few minutes. “Before we booked laser-therapy sessions, technicians were being pulled away from veterinarians,” she says.

Getting the word out

Though the practice does some radio advertising, most of their laser-therapy promotion is old-fashioned word-of-mouth—from both inside and outside the hospital walls. Dr. Montague says that it’s not uncommon for clients with pets with intervertebral disk disease to hear about laser therapy from a team member before learning about surgery or steroids.

Many clients also arrive thanks to referrals from other practices. “We were already viewed as a high-tech hospital because we perform laparoscopic and laser surgery. But laser therapy took us to a new level,” says Dr. Montague. He believes that laser therapy has given his practice an edge when clients seek advanced and alternative pain-management strategies for their aging or ailing pets.

Dr. Montague says he foresees a day when people have laser therapy units in their own homes, but his main motivation to use and promote laser therapy is simply because he believes patients deserve it. “It’s available, it’s easy, and it has the power to change lives,” he says. ■

[LiteCure: In regards to the underlined sentence above: What are the laws about this? Does the veterinarian have to prescribe the therapy originally? Diagnose the injury? Can anyone do it?]