

Well-planned barns and pastures, and innovative use of high- and low-tech gadgets can make life on the farm much easier. If you have any helpful "husbandry hints," *Alpacas Magazine* would love to hear from you.

■ **Transporting Alpacas to Veterinary Hospitals**

Most alpaca owners will someday have the stressful situation of needing to transport a sick or injured alpaca to a veterinary hospital. The hospital may be just down the road or it may be hundreds of miles from your alpaca ranch. This article will help you best prepare for that eventual trip.

Be Prepared for an Unexpected Trip

Knowledge and preparation are the best things for relieving stress from an otherwise stressful situation. Loading one of your valuable alpacas in a trailer and heading down the road seeking care at a veterinary hospital can be unnerving. Knowing what to anticipate and preparing for that event will help you improve the timeliness of getting specialized care for your alpaca.

Illness or injury to your alpaca is stressful on both you, as well as the animal itself. What can be done to minimize this stress?

There are only twenty-eight accredited Colleges of Veterinary Medicine in the United States, and a similarly small number in Canada. Alpaca owners are often referred to a veterinary hospital by their local veterinarian because of the hospital's expertise and specialized equipment. These hospitals are typically located at land grant universities and anyone may use their facilities. However, not all of these hospitals have expertise with camelids. It is a good idea to check with the veterinary hospitals that are within reasonable driving time and find out which ones are experienced with camelids. Then visit with the staff to develop contacts and better understand their protocols, in the event you need to take an alpaca to that facility.

Keep a map and list of directions to the veterinary hospital in the glove box of your towing vehicle. Include phone number for your local veterinarian, the daytime AND emergency phone numbers for the veterinary hospital, and the numbers for a few motels near the veterinary hospital (just in case you need to reserve a room.)

Have your alpaca transporting equipment reasonably prepared for travel at all times. You don't need to have the trailer hooked to your towing vehicle, but you should have ready access to the trailer. Insure that the tires, lights, and other features of the equipment are in good repair and that many of the required accessories for transport are already in the trailer. Supplies such as about a week's feed and hay, feed tub, water bucket, a halter and lead, carry sling, portable corral panels, emergency vet kit, and bedding for the trailer floor can be stored on board and ready to go. (See also: HER02 issue of *A.M.*, "Alpaca Trailer Towing Tips.")

If you will be traveling out of state, be sure that your local veterinarian has prepared your transport papers for the sick alpaca (and a companion alpaca if going along) and cleared them with the state you are entering. The AOBA members' website under the "Transportation Regs" tab has a directory of all of the state agencies.

Be sure to copy all of the health records for the alpaca you are transporting and take them with you. These records will be most helpful to the hospital and may help your alpaca avoid unnecessary tests and you avoid unnecessary expenses.

Some veterinary hospitals require a referral from a veterinarian. Find out from the hospital ahead of time what forms will be needed and work with your local vet to ensure he is familiar with the need for the document. Your local vet should summarize the animal's clinical signs, as well as any diagnostic tests or procedures that have been accomplished to date.

(See also the AUT02 issue of *A.M.*, “Working With Your Vet.”)

Before you pull out of the driveway, be sure to throw in a suitcase with a few days’ worth of clothing. If you have to stay overnight near the hospital, you will be ready to do so.

One very critical detail you should determine BEFORE the need arises is: who will take care of your animals in the event that an emergency situation takes you away from the farm for one or more days? This should be someone who is familiar with your herd, your farm, and how to care for your animals. This is an important consideration that you don’t want to have to deal with in time of crisis. Needless to say, if a situation arises that might require calling on your ranch-sitter, you will want to alert him/her to the possibility of needing his/her services. In fact, you may want to ask your ranch-sitter to assume caretaker duties so you can focus your attention on the sick or injured alpaca.

Illness or injury to your alpaca is stressful on both you, the caretaker, as well as the animal itself. Travel to the hospital will be stressful. Leaving the alpaca by itself will add even more stress. Give consideration to taking a companion alpaca (gelding or less valuable alpaca) along for the trip. If the situation warrants, you may want to consider leaving the companion animal at the hospital with the sick alpaca. The hospital staff can help you with this decision.

Travel Tips For on the Road

Needless to say, be sure to focus on your driving on the way to the vet hospital. If at all possible, have a passenger along to assist with the driving and alpaca care if needed. How often you need to stop to observe the alpaca will be dictated by the situation. If the situation allows, try to stop every hour for a few minutes to check the alpaca. A stop every two hours for about 15 minutes may diminish the alpaca’s stress by allowing your animal to stand, drink, defecate, and urinate, and for you to walk around for a few minutes.

A remote trailer camera monitor can be invaluable in this situation, allowing your passenger the ability to continuously monitor the sick alpaca while you drive on down the road. (See the WIN03 issue of *A.M.*, “Security Camera Systems for Alpaca Trailers.”)

When you are within 30 minutes of the hospital, call to let the staff know where you are, your estimated time of arrival, and update them on the alpaca’s current medical condition. This will help ensure they are ready to receive the alpaca and have called up personnel if needed.



Loading one of your valuable alpacas in a trailer and heading down the road seeking care at a veterinary hospital can be very stressful. Knowing what to anticipate and preparing for that event will help you improve the timeliness of getting specialized care for your alpaca.



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Veterinary Teaching Hospitals

Veterinary teaching hospitals are both a medical service facility and a veterinary teaching facility used as a laboratory for training students for a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (DVM) degree.

Veterinary hospitals may specialize in various types of animals, such as companion animals, equine, farm animals, camelids, exotics. But they may also specialize in areas such as emergency medicine and surgery, ophthalmology, neurology, oncology, cardiovascular medicine, and others. Regardless of such specializations, all veterinary teaching hospitals have a common mission to educate aspiring veterinarians, provide outstanding animal care, develop more effective treatment methods, and expand knowledge of animal illnesses.

Because these are teaching hospitals, typically a team of doctors and students will work with you and your alpaca. The team may include:

- A supervising DVM (faculty and/or staff)
- Interns and residents in post-graduate training
- Veterinary students pursuing the DVM degree
- Certified veterinary technicians

A visit to a veterinary hospital may take slightly longer than one with a private veterinarian because a student may complete an initial examination of your alpaca before you see the DVM.

As the owner of the alpaca, you should receive daily reports and updates on the results of diagnostic procedures and treatments. If you remain on-site at the hospital, patient visiting hours will be arranged with you. Your local veterinary should also be kept informed about diagnostic findings, treatment decisions, and discharge instructions.

What to Expect at the Veterinary Hospital

If you are transporting an emergency case, be sure that you have made direct contact with the hospital to ensure they will be able to accept you and your alpaca immediately upon arrival at the facility. Be sure to understand exactly where to go and how to check in, especially if it is an after-hours check-in.

First, your alpaca will be stabilized, unloaded, evaluated, and taken to a stall in the facility. Important health information such as your veterinary referral form (if required), veterinary records (including test results, x-rays, etc.), and all details of the current illness or injury will be gathered to learn about your alpaca's medical history and make certain the medical records are complete.

Forms for documenting a method of payment, an estimate of the anticipated expenses and important contact information will be collected. In some cases, a deposit may be required before treatment can be administered. Charges at a veterinary hospital are designed to cover their costs and are generally comparable to those of a private veterinary. It is often difficult for the hospital to give you an accurate estimate of all the anticipated charges. They will do their best. Most hospitals do accept major credit cards for this purpose.

Students will be involved in various aspects of the hospital visit. The students interact directly with clients, as a valuable part of their learning experience. Students are involved in each case because these hospitals are in effect a "classroom."

Hopefully, you will not ever have to transport an alpaca to a veterinary hospital. However, if you do, take comfort in knowing you have done all you can to improve the effectiveness of your response for the care of your alpaca.

About the authors: Bill and Sherri Duey operate Southern Iowa Alpacas ranch located in the hills of Southern Iowa 60 miles southeast of Des Moines. They specialize in raising full Accoyo herd sires. They have incorporated innovative features into their alpaca ranch and conduct seminars on business planning, animal selection and ranch setup for new alpaca ranchers. They also enjoy helping existing ranchers learn about new products and techniques for fine tuning their operation. You may view their website at www.southerniowaalpacas.com or contact them directly at alpacas@southerniowaalpacas.com.