

## Fight for Your Pharmacy in a Competitive Market

By Wendy S. Myers

You've been dispensing generic cephalexin to a client whose dog's chronic skin problems require frequent antibiotics. Instead of refilling the medication at your veterinary hospital, the client asks, "Doctor, can you write a prescription so I can get it at Wal-Mart?"



Retailers have joined internet pharmacies in pursuit of pets' prescriptions. A Walgreens brochure promotes its "America's pharmacy for pets, too." A TV consumer reporter in Tulsa, Okla. advised pet owners to "ask your vet for the prescription," "ask if there is a human drug equivalent," and then "shop it around at 1-800-PetMeds and discount retailers such as Wal-Mart, Walgreens, and Costco."

Today's price-shopped veterinary drugs include preventatives and chronic medications such as NSAIDs. Clients may ask you to match prices of internet pharmacies or write scripts so they can fill medications elsewhere. As a veterinary consultant, I want you to fight for your pharmacy. Here's how you can protect your business while providing affordable, safe drugs to patients:

**Post your prices.** On a bulletin or white board in your lobby, post prices for flea, tick and heartworm preventatives. Feature incentives such as "buy six, get one free" for flea products and rebates for 12 packs of heartworm preventatives. Retailers and internet pharmacies don't offer these veterinary exclusive perks. Too often we don't assign a monetary value to the free dose. If you'd sell the same dose for \$17, include that value in your price. At one clinic, staff posted their prices alongside a leading internet pharmacy's. With the \$17 free dose, the veterinary hospital was cheaper. Also use merchandisers and educational displays near the check-in counter to encourage clients to request refills.

**Prescribe veterinary drugs instead of human generics.** Pharmacies, grocery stores, and warehouse clubs are promoting deeply discounted generics. Writing scripts for human generic drugs and sending clients to local pharmacies will encourage them to request scripts for future medications. Your goodwill gesture to save clients money may backfire. Sending clients to outside pharmacies could result in:

- Reduced pharmacy income that limits your funds to invest in future equipment or facility improvements

- Less confidence in your professional fees. Clients may assume “If you’re overcharging me on medications, are professional services also inflated?”
- Limited client education on medications. Will the Walgreens’ pharmacist be able to answer clients’ questions about giving pills to a pets or potential drug side effects in animals?
- Increased legal risk. If a pet experiences a complication from a human drug and the client files a complaint with the state board or court, how will you defend yourself when a FDA veterinary approved drug was available?
- Shuts off the revenue pipeline to veterinary pharmaceutical companies’ research and development. Without R&D dollars, how will manufacturers create new animal drugs?

Instead of prescribing generic cephalexin, dispense Simplicef from your pharmacy. Compliance will improve because Simplicef is given once daily instead of the twice-a-day dose required for generic cephalexin. Another bonus: Walgreens doesn’t stock Simplicef.

**Call clients when you get faxes from internet pharmacies.** To save time and avoid confrontational conversations with clients, some veterinarians sign and return faxed prescription authorization requests from internet pharmacies. If you do, you’re rolling over and playing dead instead of fighting for your business.

Instead, have staff call clients about faxed prescription requests. Explain your prices, including free doses and rebates, and manufacturer guarantees. Let clients know you’re always available to answer questions and best know their pets’ medical needs. Remind pet owners that they’re supporting a local small business and keeping tax dollars in the community.

If clients insist that you write a script, note these instructions for the internet pharmacy:

- Write “US drug only”
- Write “Dispense as written” (no generics or substitutions)
- Note the number of refills = 0



Print your prescriptions on paper that has a watermark of “RX invalid” when copied or faxed. To order Kan’t Kopy security paper, visit [www.blanksusa.com](http://www.blanksusa.com).



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When the client picks up the prescription, staple the FDA article on “Purchasing Pet Drugs Online: Buyer Beware.” You can download it at <http://www.fda.gov/ForConsumers/ConsumerUpdates/ucm048164.htm>.

**Price preventatives and NSAIDs as shopped items.** If you price these drugs too high, clients may question your fees for other products and services. Markups vary based on the competitiveness of your local market. As a general guide, I recommend an 80% markup on 12 months while six months has a

**About the Author:**



Wendy S. Myers owns Communication Solutions for Veterinarians in Denver. Her consulting firm helps teams improve compliance, client service and practice management. Communication Solutions for Veterinarians has provided mystery phone shopper training to more than 2,600 receptionists nationwide. Wendy is a partner in Animal Hospital Specialty Center, a 13-doctor AAHA-accredited referral practice offering internal medicine, surgery, neurology, oncology, specialty dentistry, and emergency care in Highlands Ranch, Colorado. She is the author of four books and five videos. Subscribe to Communication Solutions for Veterinarians' e-newsletter on our website at: [www.csvets.com](http://www.csvets.com). E-mail Wendy at: [wmyers@csvets.com](mailto:wmyers@csvets.com).