

Practice Scripts

When You Have To Tell A Client “No”



In this new monthly e-newsletter feature, we'll teach you scripts to have confident conversations with your clients.

Many of our consulting clients have asked for advice on how to politely tell clients “no” when they want to return medication. Consider a policy that medication cannot be returned once dispensed. Remember, you operate a licensed pharmacy as a veterinary hospital.

The FDA Compliance Policy Guideline 7132.09, Sec. 460.300, Return of Unused Prescription Drugs to Pharmacy Stock states:

“A pharmacist should not return drugs products to his stock once they have been out of his possession. It could be a dangerous practice for pharmacists to accept and return to stock the unused portions of prescriptions that are returned by patrons, because he would no longer have any assurance of the strength, quality, purity or identity of the articles. Many state boards of pharmacy have issued regulations specifically forbidding the practice. We endorse the actions of these state boards as being in the interest of public health. The pharmacist or doctor dispensing a drug is legally responsible for all hazards of contamination or adulteration that may arise, should he mix returned portions of drugs to his shelf stocks. Some of our investigations in the past have shown that drugs returned by patrons and subsequently resold by the pharmacist were responsible for injuries.”

Also contact your state Board of Pharmacy for guidelines. Some veterinary hospitals will accept a dispensed product for refund if it is in an unopened foil wrapper or in a sealed prepackaged container. Don't accept products past their expiration dates. Carefully consider whether you want to offer a full or partial refund, charge a restocking fee or never refund prescriptions. Put your policy in writing and don't make exceptions, even for favorite clients.

When a client asks to return a prescription, you would say: “Occasionally, we receive a request to return a prescription drug after it has left our pharmacy. As a licensed pharmacy, our hospital is responsible for maintaining standards of purity and safety for all of the drugs we dispense. To ensure those standards are maintained, our State Board of Pharmacy and the FDA Compliance Policy Guidelines state we cannot accept any prescription drug for return once it has left our pharmacy. However, you can donate the unused medication to the local animal shelter or leave it with us to use for stray or injured animals that Good Samaritans bring us.”

Get Clients to Schedule Medical Progress Exams



A typical practice misses 300 to 600 rechecks for chronic conditions as well as drug monitoring, according to research from Veterinary Metrics' in Atlanta.

A doctor tells his client, "I'd like to recheck your dog's ears in two weeks." But the client hears, "If your dog isn't feeling better, see me again in two weeks." The phrase of "I'd like to" makes the follow-up visit sound optional and necessary only if the problem isn't resolved.

Instead, the doctor should say, "I will examine your dog again on (date). Ear infections can be painful and develop into a serious condition unless treated and rechecked to make sure the infection has cleared. The receptionist will schedule an appointment for you and Jake for his medical progress exam on (date)." Keep calendars in exam rooms so you can tell clients specific dates for medical progress exams. This makes your recommendation sound more important, urgent and required!

The doctor can note the recheck date on the travel sheet. When the client checks out, the receptionist says, "The doctor needs to see your dog for a medical progress exam on (date). When would be a convenient time for you and Jake? We can see Jake at 10 am or 4 pm. Which best fits your schedule?" Known as the two-yes-options technique, this method gets the medical progress exam scheduled at checkout.

Avoid the term "recheck" in client conversations. "Medical progress exam" is stronger and more professional.

When A Client Is Concerned About The Cost Of Emergency Care



If a client is worried about the cost of emergency care, explain your emergency exam fee. This is the starting point for fees. Without seeing the patient, you may not be able to provide an accurate estimate of the professional fees over the phone.

How to say it: "Let me explain what you can expect for an emergency exam. The doctor will do a full medical exam, ask you questions about your pet's symptoms and then let you know what specific tests or x-rays your pet will need. Then you can make a decision on how you want to proceed. Our emergency exam fee is \$____. Once the doctor has examined your pet, we can provide you with a written treatment plan that describes the needed services and fees."

When a client calls for a prescription refill and blood work is due

Veterinarians at Feather and Fur Animal Clinic recently set testing for pets on long-term drugs. After our consultation with the small animal Kailua, Hawaii, I recommended ways to integrate medication monitoring,

- Sending reminder cards the month before testing is due
- Putting “Blood test required before next refill” stickers on prescription vials when blood work is coming due. Besides using stickers on NSAIDs and long-term drugs, put alert stickers on 12 packs of heartworm preventatives if a heartworm test will be due before the next refill. Order stickers from Medical Arts Press at 800-328-2179.
- Giving clients a brochure when a pet starts a long-term drug that requires monitoring. IDEXX offers the brochure, “Prescription Medications: Testing helps us choose the right medication ~ monitoring helps ensure lasting effectiveness.” Antech Diagnostics provides a brochure titled “Therapeutic Drug Monitoring: Monitoring your pet’s medications and their effect on your pet’s body.”



standards hospital in including:

As Feather and Fur Animal Clinic implements its proactive reminders, clients also may learn about the new medication monitoring standards when calling to request refills. To educate clients about a new protocol, here’s how to say it:

“Just as in people, certain drugs need to be monitored to ensure maximum effectiveness and safety. Our veterinarians have studied the latest research on drug monitoring and set standards for testing. A blood test gives your veterinarian information on the level of medication in your pet’s body and any effects on your pet’s internal organs and body systems. Testing lets your doctor make any necessary medication adjustments and ensures your pet is receiving the proper dose. Just as in people, each pet will metabolize a drug differently. The medication your pet is taking requires testing every ___ months. In order to refill your pet’s prescription, we will need to perform a simple blood test that just takes a few minutes. You can schedule a technician appointment or drop by at your convenience. When would you like to come in for your pet’s blood test?”

When you need to collect a deposit for an emergency



Emotions escalate when pets get ill or injured. You want to communicate your compassion to clients and provide immediate medical care. While it’s a common management practice to collect a 50% deposit for emergencies, you want to project the image that you’re focused on the needed medical care, not just money. Collecting deposits reduces accounts receivable and bad debts while also making the client’s bill upon discharge less because half is paid upfront.

In emergency cases when the total cost of care may be unknown, provide a treatment plan to stabilize the pet and provide the first 24 hours of care. Then call the client the next morning with an update on the pet’s status as well as what additional care is needed and the cost of those services.

How to say it: “In order to get your permission to admit your pet to the hospital, I need your signature on the treatment plan and a prepayment of 50%. We will keep the

treatment plan in your pet's medical record, and I'll also give you a copy to take home so you have information on the services and fees we discussed today."

Use the term "prepayment" rather than deposit, which may give the impression the client could get a refund. Set deposit guidelines for new clients, emergencies and difficult cases such as Parvo. For example, I've consulted with practices in rural Kentucky and Louisiana that see more than their fair share of Parvo cases. Because Parvo has high mortality rates, the hospitals collect a 100% deposit upon admission. This ensures patients get the intensive care they need and the hospitals get paid for all of the services performed.

How to say it: "When a dog has Parvo Virus, its intestines are compromised. The dog vomits and suffers from chronic diarrhea. Dogs require immediate treatment because Parvo is a painful disease that's highly contagious to other dogs. Parvo requires intensive care in the hospital for several days. Our care includes intravenous fluids, added electrolytes, antibiotics and medications to minimize vomiting. We also will treat intestinal parasites that can be an integral part of this disease. Our doctors and technicians take special precautions when treating dogs with Parvo. We closely monitor your dog and keep it in our isolation ward where your dog cannot expose other dogs to the virus. Medical staff who treat Parvo patients must wear disposable gloves and gowns, and clean their shoes in a special chlorine foot bath to prevent hospital contamination of the virus. Because of this level of intensive care, we need prepayment of the full amount of the treatment plan upon admission to the hospital."

How to Get Phone Shoppers to Schedule Appointments

By Debbie Arvanitis, Client Services Manager, and Beverly A. Finamore, Administrative Assistant



As part of our Mystery Phone Shopper Training Program, we have called more than 1,000 receptionists across the country. One of the surprising things that we have learned from these calls is that only 39% of staff members ask for the appointment.

According to the National Commission on Veterinary Economic Issues, the top phone-shopped veterinary services are exams, vaccinations and elective surgeries such as spays and neuters. Having exceptional phone skills are even more important in today's economy.

- It's the first step on the caller's journey to becoming a client.
- The phone is your most powerful marketing tool.
- Smile! The caller can't see you but can HEAR your enthusiasm (or stress).
- Tailor the conversation to the caller.
- Offer callers more than they ask for.

If you've done your best to impress the caller with the excellent service she can expect to receive at your practice, shouldn't making the appointment be the ultimate goal?

Always ask for the appointment and offer the caller two choices. Known as the "two yes options" technique, this phrasing significantly increases the chance you'll schedule the appointment. For example, "**WHEN** would you like to schedule your puppy's exam? I have an opening tomorrow or on Tuesday. **Which** best fits your schedule?"



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Our Mystery Phone Shopper Training Package provides confidential coaching with an action plan for skill development. Our program includes:

- Audio CD recording of the call
- Transcript of the call
- Evaluation and specific recommendations
- Action plan for phone skill development
- Clinic scorecard

For more information or to enroll for the Mystery Phone Shopper Training Package, call 720-344-2347 or [click here](#).

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