

4 Compliance Mistakes Every Team Makes

By Wendy S. Myers



During a consultation at a Tennessee practice last November, I observed a veterinarian diagnose two cats with Grade 3 dental disease. The doctor recommended dental cleanings, and then shockingly said, “But wait until February so you can get the dental month discount.”

No other medical profession puts their fees on sale. Would you wait to get a broken leg fixed until National Orthopedic Month? Of course not!

Our blunders lead to compliance fiascos. Here are faux pas that practice teams commit daily and how to correct them:

1. Asking clients if they want preventatives. Staff members often ask pet owners, “Do you need any heartworm or flea preventatives today?” This yes-or-no question gives clients an option to say no.

Instead, encourage compliance. When the technician greets the client in the exam room, say, “For your annual visit, we will do a nose-to-tail physical exam, vaccines, intestinal parasite screen, heartworm/tick test, and refill 12 months of heartworm and flea preventatives. Is there anything else you want to discuss with the doctor today?”

Telling the client “we will refill your medication today” is a compliance technique that will have more pets going home with year-round protection. If clients ask “how much will everything cost?” the technician can prepare a treatment plan or access prices on computers in exam rooms. Keep a price reference sheet for preventatives in exam rooms so you also can explain rebates, savings, and free doses.

Assume that clients want year-round protection for their pets. Simply state “we will refill your medication today” and then shut up. Judging what the client can afford may have you talking her out of products she intended to buy.

2. Delegating flea product sales exclusively to front-desk staff. Many practice teams rely on clients to get flea preventatives at the front desk. This medical recommendation needs to happen in exam rooms. Have doctors and technicians explain medical reasons for flea and tick

control. When the technician takes a brief history before the doctor enters the exam room, he should ask:

- What flea and tick product do you use, and how often do you apply it?
- What heartworm preventative do you use, and what day of the month do you give it?



If the client doesn't respond appropriately, educate the pet owner about the importance of administering preventatives consistently. Say "every 30 days" instead of "once a month" because the client may misinterpret dosing frequency, giving preventatives on the first this month and on the fifteenth next month. Dosing "every 30 days" will help guard against breaks in protection.

In tick endemic areas, counsel clients about tick-borne diseases. Take a three-step approach. First, perform annual screening for tick-borne disease with a test such as IDEXX's SNAP 4Dx. Second, vaccinate the dog for Lyme disease. Third, prescribe flea and tick control. Think of protecting dogs from Lyme disease as a three-legged stool with testing, vaccinating and using preventatives as each of the legs. If you pull any leg out, the stool will fall over, leaving the pet at risk.

3. Making wish-washy recommendations instead of saying, "Your pet needs..." A veterinarian told a client, "I'd recommend having your dog's teeth cleaned anytime during the next three months." What the client heard was, "You don't have to do it now." Another year will likely pass before the dental recommendation is revisited.

Instead, the veterinarian should say, "Your dog has Grade 2 dental disease. He needs a professional dental cleaning now to slow the progression of dental disease and treat his oral infection. As dental disease gets worse, serious health problems can happen. It's common for pets to get painful abscesses or a toothache that causes them to eat less or not at all. Bacteria in the mouth can pass through the bloodstream and permanently damage the kidneys, heart, liver, and lungs. My technician will explain the 12 steps of a professional cleaning and give you a dental treatment plan."

"Need" is stronger than "recommend." Persuade the client to accept treatment now because the longer she waits, the more expensive care will become.



4. Offering discounts. Banish your dental month discount.

Instead, make February “Dental Awareness Month” with educational displays. Avoid discounting services no matter what the month because it harms the perception of value for professional services.

Create fee structures for Grade 1, 2, 3 and 4 professional dental cleanings. Have a 25 percent price difference between each category. A Grade 1 dental cleaning is the least expensive while Grade 4 is the most costly. This pricing structure encourages clients to get pets treated now rather than waiting until advanced disease is present. Staff could tell clients they don’t need to wait until February because you’ve made the price affordable no matter what time of year.

Watch for words and phrases that may be discouraging compliance. When you explain services and products with conviction, you’ll get more pets the medical care they need.

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. E-mail Wendy at: wmyers@csvets.com.