

Get Clients to Say “YES!” to Preanesthetic Testing

Hurried clients often decline preanesthetic testing because we haven't dedicated the necessary time to explain the importance and cost of diagnostic testing.

By Wendy S. Myers



A client arrives at 7:30 am to admit her dog, Ginger, for a professional dental cleaning. A receptionist hands her an anesthesia consent form and pen, and then excuses herself to answer the ringing phone. The second line rings while another client arrives to drop off her cat, Whitney, for a spay. Juggling too many clients and phone lines leaves the receptionist feeling frazzled—and both clients declining

preanesthetic testing.

When you tell clients to “drop off” surgery and dentistry patients, the term implies the admission process will take seconds. Clients assume they can hand you a leash or carrier and dash off to work. But it honestly takes 10 to 15 minutes to review the consent form and estimate, explain preanesthetic testing, gather phone numbers and confirm what time the pet will be discharged. Instead of a “dump at the desk” approach to surgery and dentistry, consider these strategies to improve client compliance for preanesthetic testing.

Explain preanesthetic testing when the procedure is recommended. When the doctor says Ginger needs a professional dental cleaning, he can describe the benefits of preanesthetic testing. The doctor might say, “We need to do a preanesthetic blood test to ensure Ginger is in good health. Blood work is like an ‘internal exam’ that will check her organ function and identify any unknown diseases. When we have a better understanding of red blood cell, white blood cell and platelet parameters, our patients have less risk when undergoing anesthesia. We’ll also have a baseline as part of Ginger’s medical history. If Ginger’s test results are within normal ranges, we will proceed with confidence. If results aren’t within normal ranges, we can alter the anesthetic procedure or take other precautions to safeguard her health and reduce the risk of possible complications.”

Consider whether you want to perform the preanesthetic test the morning of the procedure or when the client accepts your recommendation. For example, if the client will schedule Ginger’s professional dental cleaning this week, you might draw blood for the preanesthetic test

now. Because the client pays for the blood work as part of today's services, you can choose whether to perform the preanesthetic test in-house or through your reference laboratory. Prepaid blood work also guarantees the client will show up for the procedure and reduces the client's perception of the cost of the professional dental cleaning because part of the services has already been paid.



Create a pre-surgical folder for surgery and dentistry. Personalize this pocketed folder with a label with your hospital logo and contact information. The folder contains a preanesthetic testing brochure, consent form, surgery appointment card reminder with fasting instructions and admission time and handouts on laser surgery, pain management and related items. Present the folder when the

recommendation is accepted so the client can share information with other family members at home and make decisions before the morning of surgery.

Include preanesthetic testing in every treatment plan. The term “estimate” emphasizes money, while “treatment plan” focuses on needed medical care. Whether you recommend or require preanesthetic testing, include it in every treatment plan. Give clients the IDEXX brochure, “Anesthesia and Your Pet: Why Testing Is Necessary.” Staff members can explain the benefits and costs of preanesthetic testing when reviewing the treatment plan. It's best to remove doctors from the money conversation because they make recommendations based on medical need, not the cost of care. Consider three categories of preanesthetic tests such as healthy animals under age 7, healthy senior pets age 7 and older, and patients with illnesses or chronic diseases. You can build templates in your veterinary software for commonly recommended anesthetic procedures by age and weight categories.

Schedule admission appointments. If your practice is like most, you ask clients to “drop off” pets for surgery and dentistry in the early hours your clinic is open. Murphy's Law will have everyone arrive at once, and receptionists who are answering the flood of morning calls must stop to collect signatures on consent forms, quickly explain preanesthetic testing and get phone numbers where clients can be reached today. You drop off your dry cleaning—not a beloved

family member for surgery. Hurried clients often check “decline” on preanesthetic testing because we haven’t dedicated the necessary time to explain the importance and cost of such diagnostic testing.

Remove “drop off” from your hospital vocabulary and forms. You can deliver a higher level of service and increase compliance for preanesthetic testing with admission appointments. Create a technician column in your appointment schedule and designate a surgery or treatment technician who will admit these patients. Admission appointments typically take 10 to 15 minutes. Front-load the schedule with the most complex cases checking in first. If your practice has five anesthetic procedures tomorrow, schedule a grade 4 dental cleaning for admission at 7:30 am, the lump removal at 7:40 am, a spay at 7:50 am, a grade 2 dental cleaning at 8:00 am



and a cat neuter at 8:10 am. All of your patients will be checked into the hospital with enough time for pre-surgical exams and preanesthetic testing. If you instead tell clients to “drop off” between 7:30 and 8:30 am, a few might stroll in after 9:00 am and domino the game plan for the day’s surgeries, causing stress on both the staff and patients. Because patients undergoing complex procedures arrive first, they also have more time for recovery and for you to prepare go-home medications and instructions.

Here is a sample confirmation call script: “This is Sharon calling from Myers Veterinary Hospital to remind you of Ollie’s surgery tomorrow. Please withhold food after 8:00 pm tonight. Your surgery admission appointment is scheduled for 7:45-7:55 am with a technician, who will spend 10 minutes reviewing the consent form, answering your questions and getting numbers where we can reach you the day of surgery. **Please allow at least 10 minutes** for Ollie’s admission to the hospital. If you have questions, please call us at 555-555-5555. We look forward to seeing you and Ollie tomorrow morning at 7:45.”

Make paperwork easy for you and clients. When pulling records for tomorrow’s surgeries, print treatment plans (formerly called estimates) and consent forms and stuff preanesthetic brochures in medical records. Then you’ll have paperwork organized before clients arrive.

Some practices put consent forms and handouts on their websites. When making surgery confirmation calls, direct clients to your website using benefit statements. For example, “Mrs.

Myers, I'm calling to confirm Ollie's surgery admission appointment tomorrow at 7:45 am. You can visit our hospital's website at www.yourwebsite.com to download, print and sign your surgery consent form. You also can read our brochure that explains preanesthetic testing. This will speed Ollie's admission to the hospital in the morning. If you prefer, we're also glad to have his paperwork ready when you arrive tomorrow morning." To get a PDF file of IDEXX's preanesthetic testing brochure to put on your hospital's website, visit <http://www.idexx.com/animalhealth/education/diagnosticedge/6354801m.pdf>.

Lastly, praise clients who choose preanesthetic testing for their pets because what gets reward gets repeated. Say, "Mrs. Myers, you made the right decision by choosing preanesthetic testing for Ollie. Now we'll ensure his safety for anesthesia and also have a baseline for future reference. The test we perform today will become part of Ollie's medical history."

With savvy approaches to client education and compliance, your patients will experience a higher level of care and your practice will enjoy the medical and financial benefits of preanesthetic testing.

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.