

## Give Your Patients a Compliance Makeover

By Wendy S. Myers

Every patient visit presents an opportunity to maximize compliance. During a consultation at a California practice, I identified compliance possibilities for two patients. You can do the same by screening patient records before appointments and taking a team approach to capturing every wellness opportunity.

### Hondo, a 14-year-old Akita mixed breed dog



**Patient history:** Hondo visited for a physical exam, vaccines, and heartworm and intestinal parasite tests. He was due for distemper vaccination today, but Bordetella was two years overdue and Leptospirosis was one year past due. The neutered dog weighed 48.6 pounds and had a good body condition score. The owner feeds Hondo Kirkland adult dog food from Costco. She asked about arthritis because Hondo moves slower on stairs and has less energy. After performing a comprehensive physical exam, the veterinarian found moderate tartar and gingivitis, trembling hind legs, and Hondo's hips were tender upon manipulation. Other exam findings were within normal limits. The veterinarian discussed a NSAID trial. The owner declined flea control.

**Services delivered:** Hondo received an exam, vaccines, senior wellness screen, heartworm test, intestinal parasite test, and 12 pack of heartworm preventatives. The owner agreed to consider a professional dental cleaning and NSAID trial pending senior test results.

#### **Compliance team makeover:**

- **Receptionist:** Screen Hondo's record before the appointment to identify needed services and products. Note compliance opportunities in the medical record or highlight items on a travel sheet to organize details for the doctor and technician. For Hondo, the receptionist would have flagged two overdue vaccines, refill of heartworm preventative, and no flea control in the client's purchase history.

- **Technician:** Discuss the importance of flea control. Ask the owner what day of the month she gives Hondo his heartworm preventative so you can check compliance for monthly dosing. Because Hondo eats Kirkland adult dog food and is 14 years old, mention that the veterinarian may suggest a senior dog food. A therapeutic diet also could help improve Hondo's joints. Introduce senior wellness testing as an "internal physical exam" that will check organ function and catch diseases early.
- **Veterinarian:** Discuss a joint or senior diet instead of adult dog food. Recommend flea control. Call the client with senior screen results and schedule the professional dental cleaning. Revisit her dog's pain and ask if she'd like to consider the NSAID trial.

### Milo, a 16-year-old cat



**Patient history:** Milo visited for a comprehensive exam. The owner suspects fleas and urinary incontinence. Milo will urinate on puppy pads but refuses to use his litter box. The neutered cat weighs 9.5 pounds and eats Special Kitty canned cat food from Wal-Mart. Milo's last medical visit was in 2002. The indoor-outdoor cat was previously diagnosed with hyperthyroidism. The owner uses flea control for Milo. After examining the senior cat, the veterinarian found flea dirt and severe tartar and gingivitis.

**Services delivered:** Milo received an exam, flea control, senior screen with a T4 to check his thyroid, urinalysis, and vaccines.

### Compliance opportunities:

- **Receptionist:** Because Milo's last visit was in 2002, this senior cat has significant compliance gaps. The receptionist could review the record to note the need for an exam, vaccines, thyroid test as follow up to hyperthyroidism on the master problem sheet, intestinal parasite test, feline heartworm test, and lack of feline heartworm preventative or deworming. The 16-year-old cat also has never had a professional dental cleaning.
- **Technician:** Talk with the client about the importance of an intestinal parasite test, especially since Milo goes outdoors. Also introduce feline heartworm testing and preventatives. Discuss the importance of a senior or therapeutic diet.

- **Veterinarian:** Help the client understand the need for twice-a-year wellness exams for a 16-year-old cat. When using human age analogy, Milo is 80 years old. Discuss parasite testing and prevention, especially for indoor-outdoor cats. Recommend a senior or therapeutic diet and supplements that will help Milo's urinary problems and aging conditions. Strongly recommend a professional dental cleaning and have the technician present a dental treatment plan today. Explain that the senior blood test performed today also can double as a preanesthetic test for Milo's dental cleaning. Echo the key points on feline heartworm disease and prevention that the technician introduced. Clients often need to hear a message three times before taking action. When the doctor calls the client with Milo's senior screen and urinalysis results, he can schedule the dental cleaning.

When you take a team approach to compliance, you'll be better patient advocates. Try this exercise: Review four medical records and invoices from patients you saw today. Note what compliance opportunities were successfully captured and, more importantly, what you could do to close the gaps. This habit will help you be more proactive every patient visit.

### 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).