

How Your Doctors Can Set Vaccination Protocols

Without organized standards of care, you'll have confused clients, poor compliance and frustrated staff.

By Wendy S. Myers



Getting doctors to agree on protocols can sometimes be like herding cats. But the consequences are confused clients, poor compliance and frustrated staff. Have your veterinarians create standards of care for wellness exams, including vaccinations and diagnostic testing.

When doctors agree on core wellness services, you consistently deliver better patient care, better client service and better practice health. To get started, schedule a doctors' meeting after hours or when the practice is closed so you can plan without interruptions. As a veterinary consultant, I've facilitated protocol workshops with many practices, and most doctors need at least two hours to define wellness protocols for puppies, kittens, seniors and adults. Encourage doctors to openly consider new ideas, from the latest published research to newly launched products. Do your homework, and consider which possibilities are right for your patients and practice.

Create an agenda for your doctors' meeting with discussion questions such as:

- What are our core vaccines for puppies, kittens, adults and seniors?
- What diseases will we vaccinate for based upon risk assessment? Consider diseases such as Feline Leukemia, Feline Infectious Peritonitis, Lyme, Leptospirosis and Giardia.
- What new products and vaccines should consider? Many pharmaceutical companies introduce new products during the first quarter, which also is the perfect time to review and update your protocols and inventory.
- Should we consider modified vaccination protocols? What diseases would we vaccinate for annually and which would be every three years? For example, you might give a distemper vaccine every three years. Single antigen vaccines such as Leptospirosis, Lyme and Bordetella might be given annually based on risk assessment. In states such as Connecticut, New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania where Lyme disease is highest according to the Centers for Disease

Control and Prevention (CDC), the standard of care might be protecting all dogs against Lyme disease as a core rather than non-core vaccine.

- What client education will we need to implement? Ask pharmaceutical representatives for brochures, posters and in-clinic displays.
- How will our reminder system need to be updated to reflect our new protocols? Make sure your vaccine reminders match the administration interval, especially when you change from annual to modified protocols.
- How will we teach staff our new standards of care?
- What messages will our staff communicate to clients about the changes?
- When do we plan to implement these standards of care?

Do Your Homework



When modifying protocols, read the latest research online and in veterinary journals. Visits websites for information about:

- National Pet Wellness Month, www.npwm.com
- Feline wellness, www.catwellness.org
- Heartworm testing and prevention, American Heartworm

Society, www.heartwormsociety.org

- Feline vaccinations, American Association of Feline Practitioners, www.aafponline.org
- Canine vaccinations, American Animal Hospital Association, www.aahanet.org
- Vaccination resources, American Veterinary Medical Association, www.avma.org/vaccination/default.asp
- Senior care and dental guidelines, American Animal Hospital Association, www.aahanet.org
- Parasite control and screening, Companion Animal Parasite Council, www.capcvet.org, 877-227-2674
- Zoonotic disease prevention, Centers for Disease Control, Guidelines for Veterinarians: Prevention of Zoonotic Transmission of Ascarids and Hookworms of Dogs and Cats, www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dpd/parasites/ascaris/prevention.htm

Assign a specific protocol area for each doctor to develop. For example, Doctor #1 might research vaccines; Doctor #2 reviews external and internal parasite protocols; and Doctor #3

looks into diagnostic testing such as wellness and senior screens, intestinal parasite screens and specific disease testing such as Lyme, heartworm and feline leukemia. Each doctor will present a draft of the protocol area he or she researched to get feedback so veterinarians can make final revisions as a medical team. Involve associate veterinarians to get their opinions and buy-in. Then they'll consistently follow the protocols they helped create.



Be specific and commit protocols to writing. Keep a protocols notebook in each area of the hospital. For example, wellness protocols would be kept near exam rooms and the lab/pharmacy where vaccines are stored. A lab protocols notebook on diagnostic testing would be kept in the lab. The dentistry protocols notebook would be near the dental wet table.

Before announcing new standards of care to clients, plan a hospital-wide meeting to distribute written protocols and answer staff members' questions. Then set a kick-off date when you'll implement the changes. With doctors and staff in step with the same plan, clients will follow.

Refresh and energize team members' commitment to your hospital's wellness protocols with monthly staff meetings that train them on the details of diseases and prevention. For example, invite a pharmaceutical representative to provide staff training on the specific vaccines you carry. Then your team can confidently answer clients' questions and understand the science behind the products you use.

Create an organized approach

Have veterinarians create a checklist of services and discussion topics for puppies, kittens, adults and seniors. This organized approach will let staff members better support doctors in exam rooms. They can start appointments, gathering a brief history; getting the patient's temperature, pulse and respiration; drawing up vaccines; and collecting samples for testing. Delegate client education to staff so they know what wellness topics to cover based on the pet's age. For example, here is a sample checklist for adult pets age 1 to 6 based upon twice-a-year wellness exams. You can add your practice's core and non-core vaccines to the list.

First Wellness Exam

- ✓ Comprehensive physical exam



- ✓ Oral exam to check teeth and gums, including grading of dental disease
- ✓ Vaccinations based on risk assessment, age and health status
- ✓ Intestinal parasite screen (CDC recommends every six months for adult pets.)
- ✓ Heartworm test (American Heartworm Society recommends annual testing.)
- ✓ Body condition score (A 2003 Purina Lifespan Study found dogs

that maintain a healthy body condition score could add up to two years or 15 percent to their lifespan, <http://purina.com/science/research/LinkBodyFat.aspx>.)

- ✓ Discussion about home dental care
- ✓ Wellness blood and urine baseline screen

Second Wellness Exam, 6 months later

- ✓ Comprehensive physical exam
- ✓ Oral exam to check teeth and gums, including grading of dental disease
- ✓ Vaccinations based on risk assessment, age and health status (Bordetella, which prevents kennel cough, may be given every six months to dogs.)
- ✓ Intestinal parasite screen (CDC recommends every six months for adult pets.)
- ✓ Body condition score
- ✓ Discussion about home dental care
- ✓ Professional dental cleaning recommended if needed
- ✓ Discuss wellness blood and urine baseline screen again if the client did not accept it last visit

When your veterinarians have specific standards of care for puppies, kittens, adults and seniors, you'll make better risk-management decisions and gain clients' confidence that you're using the latest research and products available. Doctors need to review written protocols annually or whenever a new drug, technique or research becomes available that may change your current protocols.

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.