

## How Your Groomers Can Spot More Medical Problems

If pets regularly visit your hospital for grooming services, your groomers can play an integral role in detecting medical problems early.

By Wendy S. Myers



Maureen Amen, the assistant grooming manager at TenderCare Veterinary Medical Center in Greenwood Village, Colo., was the first to notice a tiny lump on George's elbow. A few months later, the 7-year-old miniature Schnauzer developed a fatty tumor on his stomach. Each time, Amen explained her findings to the client and recommended that George see a veterinarian immediately. The contentious client saw her veterinarian after each instance and George got the medical treatment he needed thanks to groomer who sees the pet each month.

If you offer grooming services at your veterinary hospital, your groomers can spot dirty ears, lumps, allergies, or skin conditions that need a veterinarian's attention. A groomer can call the client and ask whether the pet may be treated, saving the client a second trip to your hospital. With a proper wellness screening system, grooming services should refer about 23 percent of cases to the hospital for some form of healthcare, say authors Thomas E. Catanzaro, DVM, MHA, FACHE, and Philip Siebert Jr., CVT, in their book, *Veterinary Practice Management Secrets* (Hanley & Belfus, 2000).

### **Extending your healthcare team**

Because groomers see many pets every four to six weeks, they can detect health concerns early and notice subtle behavior changes. "Sometimes you can tell if a pet isn't feeling well," Amen says. "If the pet isn't its usual self, I tell the client and a veterinarian." At TenderCare Veterinary Medical Center, groomers see many senior dogs and watch for physical and behavioral changes.

To help groomers become an extension of your healthcare team, a veterinarian or technician can teach them about common signs of inhalant and food allergies, ear problems, fatty tumors, eye problems, obesity, and more. If a pet has allergies, the groomer can follow the veterinarian's recommendations for therapeutic shampoos and a regular grooming schedule.

Clients also appreciate a staff member who notices subtle details so they have more treatment choices.

Groomers can get additional training from the National Dog Groomers Association of America in Clark, Pa., at (724) 962-2711 or [www.nationaldoggroomers.com](http://www.nationaldoggroomers.com). The organization offers a certification program, seminars, study kits and grooming competitions.

Veterinarians should set vaccination protocols for pets receiving grooming or boarding services at your hospital. Every pet needs protection to limit the risk of exposure to contagious diseases such as kennel cough. Receptionists should check the pet's medical record before each grooming appointment to confirm that vaccinations are current. If the pet receives medical services at another hospital, the receptionist can call to confirm the pet's vaccination status. Some veterinarians may set protocols for more frequent *Bordetella* vaccination because of the increased and routine exposure to other dogs.

You can create a new-client registration form for grooming clients that outlines your vaccination requirements, grooming fees, and whether to resuscitate the pet in case of an emergency. Your grooming form can double as a consent form that helps limit your liability.

When clients check in for grooming appointments, your receptionist might ask questions to prompt medical services, such as:

- “While you're here today, do you need any flea and tick products?”
- “Would you like to take home some heartworm preventives for your pet when you check out?”
- “Has your pet had any changes in its diet or behavior since your last grooming appointment?”
- “Because your pet will be due for vaccinations next month, would you like to schedule a veterinary visit to coincide with your next grooming appointment?”
- “While your pet is here today, do you need any veterinary services?”
- “Would you like us to give your pet permanent identification with a microchip today?”
- “Would you like to check your pet's weight today and see if it falls within the normal range for its breed?”

These subtle messages can encourage clients to provide optimal wellness for their pets and help them see the value of receiving grooming services at a veterinary hospital. Grooming clients may add food, preventive medications, healthy treats, shampoos, or other products when

they check out. You'll increase your average transaction for grooming clients and know that your team has recommended the best care possible.

### **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).