

Improve Medication Monitoring for Pets on Long-Term Drugs

Proactive steps you can take rather than catching blood work on refills

By Wendy S. Myers

Today, almost 40% of the pet population is age 7 or older. Arthritis affects one in five dogs and 90% of cats over age 12. Because many older pets need long-term medications, doctors should set standards for the frequency of testing.



Drug monitoring ensures safe administration and identifies any side effects or potential complications or interactions with other drugs. Monitoring pets on long-term medications lets veterinarians establish a baseline for patients and detect any changes early so medication adjustments can be made.

To create protocols for medication monitoring, have doctors discuss the type and frequency of tests for arthritis, heart, seizure, thyroid, urethral incontinence, and allergy medications. Many drug package inserts and veterinary journals have suggested protocols your doctors can consult when developing your guidelines. Reference laboratories also have suggested tests and frequency of testing for long-term drugs. For example, consider conducting liver and kidney function blood tests prior to administration of arthritis medication and repeat every six months.

Once doctors define testing standards, you'll need to educate clients and set up reminder systems. Too often, staff members catch needed blood work when a client calls for a refill. Worse yet, the client gave the last dose and needs a refill immediately. Instead, take a proactive approach with these steps:



Explain the need for drug monitoring when the first prescription is dispensed. Give clients the brochure, “Prescription Medications: Testing helps us choose the right medication—monitoring helps ensure lasting effectiveness” from IDEXX Laboratories or “Therapeutic Drug Monitoring” from Antech. Explain why you need to conduct blood tests prior to drug administration as well as the intervals of routine retesting.

Enter the number of refills. When filling the first prescription, the technician notes the number of refills available in the computer and medical record. For example, if a doctor wants a blood test every six months and the technician is filling a one-month supply, five refills of 30 tablets are available. The number of refills also prints on each prescription label.

If a client whose dog takes NSAIDs for arthritis calls for a refill, the receptionist can access the client's record on the computer and instantly see if the medication can be refilled without having to ask a doctor or pull a medical record. This is a significant time saver and provides timely answers for clients.

Send reminders for testing. When the initial prescription for a long-term drug is filled, enter a reminder in your veterinary software for the follow-up blood test. Create a computer code such as "Arthritis Medication Monitoring Blood Test" that has a six-month reminder. This code is entered in addition to the prescription.

In six months, this code will trigger a reminder such as: (Pet name) has been previously diagnosed with a medical condition that requires monitoring. Maintaining your pet's health is important to us. (Pet name) is due for a blood test for medication monitoring, which is required for future prescription refills. Please call us at 555-555-5555 for an appointment.

Create medication monitoring codes such as:

- Arthritis medication monitoring
- Heart medication monitoring
- Seizure medication monitoring
- Thyroid medication monitoring
- Urethral incontinence medication monitoring
- Allergy medication monitoring



Use stickers when testing is coming due. When blood work will be due before the next refill, put a colored label on the prescription vial such as "Blood test required before next refill." The prescription label also will note that zero refills remain.

As the pet population ages and use of long-term medications grows, more patients will need routine testing to confirm the safe administration and proper dosing of long-term medications. Start your medication monitoring program today.

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.