

Selling Pet Owners the Value of Prevention

Staying current on wellness services and products saves clients money

By Wendy S. Myers

After three sleepless nights from Scruffy's continual scratching, chewing and licking, Sam Shepherd called his veterinarian's office at 8 a.m. He was grateful for an available afternoon appointment. The doctor explained that fleas and a hot spot were to blame. The pesky parasites led to these services:

- Physical exam
- Skin cytology
- Blood test to check for anemia
- Intestinal parasite test
- Wound care to clip and clean the hot spot
- Antibiotics for a skin infection
- Deworming medication
- Preventatives



After the veterinary visit totaling nearly \$300, Sam and Scruffy both enjoyed a good night's sleep. You can help clients avoid the inconvenience and expense of diagnosing and treating parasites with year-round protection. Sam had previously purchased a single dose of a flea preventative three months ago. Inconsistencies in compliance meant Scruffy was at risk. Here are ways to teach clients the value of staying healthy, which also saves them money:

Encourage packs over single doses. At a Baton Rouge, Louisiana clinic, team members tracked clients who bought single doses of preventatives for one month. Only 20 percent returned the following month to repurchase. A client may assume a \$20 single dose is more affordable than a \$90 pack today, but the lack of continual protection may lead to an expensive veterinary bill like Scruffy's.

Price products so clients have a financial incentive to buy packs. For example, the markup on a single dose might be 150% while a six pack is 125% and a 12 pack is 100%. Single dosing

is more costly for your business because staff must break open boxes, give instructions on how to use, and then repeat the transaction 12 times throughout the year.

Leverage the “buy six, get one free” bonus for topicals like Frontline Plus. This lowers the price even more. When checking out clients at the front desk, ask “Would you like to get a free dose of Frontline Plus valued at \$20 when you buy a six pack?” Remember, online pharmacies don’t offer these additional savings.



Check sales history before appointments. When preparing charts for tomorrow’s patients, receptionists can search medical records or computer files for compliance opportunities such as date of last preventative purchase, products sold, and number of doses sold. This lets doctors and technicians identify needed services and products for tomorrow’s visit. You also may find cases where preventatives are shared among pets in the same family and none are getting the year-round protection they need.

Here are items to note during chart preparation:

- Date of last preventative purchase
- Products sold
- Number of doses sold
- Diagnostic testing due (i.e. heartworm and tick-borne disease testing, intestinal parasite testing, medication monitoring, wellness screen for adults or seniors, etc.)
- Vaccines due

Promote the need for preventatives every visit. Whether a client is arriving for a medical exam or simply dropping in to buy food, ask “What preventative refills can I get for you today?” Asking “what” subtly indicates the client needs a refill on preventatives and is stronger than “Do you need any Frontline Plus today?” which is a yes-or-no answer.

Ask history questions to gauge compliance. When starting the appointment in the exam room, a technician should ask the client, “What parasite preventatives do you give your pet, and what day of the month do you give them?” This will identify if consistent monthly dosing takes place or a conversation is needed about products and the frequency of use.

Educate clients about flea control. By the time a client sees adult fleas, there is already an infestation. Adult fleas represent 5 percent of the flea population, with eggs making up 50

percent, larvae comprising 35 percent, and pupae as 10 percent. Female fleas can lay 25 to 50 eggs per day, which hatch in two to five days. Fleas then mate within 24 hours, keeping the cycling going.

Share facts about parasites during client conversations and provide product brochures. Disgusting descriptions might motivate clients to take action. Rather than calling the evidence “flea dirt” use the phrase “flea stool” or “flea poop.” When explaining the flea life cycle, call larvae “maggots.” After all, no one wants flea poop and maggots in the bed!



Staying parasite-free will cost clients just a few dollars per month compared to unexpected veterinary bills after there’s a problem. Worse yet, in multi-pet households, every animal will need treatment for fleas.

Use bulletin boards to teach clients the savings of prevention versus the cost of diagnosis and treatment. For example, post the number of heartworm positive dogs in your practice last year. Then list the cost to diagnose and treat heartworms in a 50-pound dog. Next, list the cost of a 12-month supply of preventatives for a 50-pound dog. Divide the amount by 365 days to get your cost per day. This powerful example can help clients see the value and affordability of year-round protection. Adapt this same bulletin board idea for intestinal parasites, ticks, and fleas.

Send reminders for preventatives. Research from Veterinary Metrics in Atlanta found less than 25 percent of practices send reminders for repurchasing preventatives. Take a proactive approach and automate product reminders in your veterinary software. Create separate computer codes by dose size and pack. For example, you would have four codes for Frontline Plus for dogs in size 45-88 pounds: single dose, three pack, six pack, and 12 pack. The quantity of each item sold is one. Do not create a catch-all code where team members simply enter the number of doses because then reminders must be entered manually, which likely will not happen consistently.

Product purchased	Reminder interval
12-month supply of parasite preventative	Remind in 11 months
6-month supply of parasite preventative	Remind in 5 months
Single dose of parasite preventative	Callback in 20 days



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According to the 2003 American Animal Hospital Association compliance study, “A Path to High-Quality Care,” only 48 percent of clients give pets monthly heartworm preventatives. You likely already send reminders for vaccines, exams and diagnostic testing but are you missing a significant opportunity with preventative repurchases? Sending a reminder for a \$30 heartworm test but missing a \$90 product is foolish!

When clients skip preventative doses or delay wellness services, more pets will get ill. Have your team send a strong message about the value of staying healthy, which includes vaccines, preventatives, exams, and diagnostic tests.

About the Author:

Wendy S. Myers owns Communication Solutions for Veterinarians in Denver, Colorado. Her



consulting firm helps practice owners and teams improve compliance, client service and hospital management. Communication Solutions for Veterinarians has provided mystery phone shopper training for more than 1,500 receptionists nationwide. Wendy is the author of three books and five videos. Subscribe to Communication Solutions for Veterinarians' monthly e-newsletter at www.csvets.com.