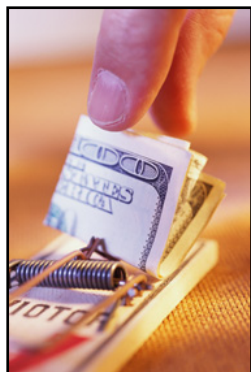


Smart Ways to Increase Your Average Charge Per Transaction

In a changing economy, be sure to stress the value of prevention

By Wendy S. Myers



A sluggish economy may have you nervously watching practice income. As families prioritize pet care during tighter times, you can stress the value of prevention while also ensuring a healthy average charge per transaction for your business.

Strive for an average charge per doctor transaction of 3 to 3.4 times your wellness exam fee. If you charge \$45 for a wellness exam, your average doctor transaction should be between \$135 and \$153. Here are ways to save clients money while also protecting your bottom line:

Perform an intestinal parasite test every wellness exam. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (www.cdc.gov) recommends screening pets every six months. When a client questions the cost of an intestinal parasite test because her pet takes year-round preventatives, explain that testing ensures the medication is protecting her pet from the most common parasites and also checks for Giardia and coccidia.

Besides screening for parasites with zoonotic potential, a fecal test gives clients peace of mind. If unprotected, a pet could become ill. Then the client would face the cost of a physical exam, fecal test, blood test to check for anemia, and medication. Taking a proactive approach with routine testing and year-round preventatives saves clients cash in the long run.

Encourage parasite protection through winter months. Cooler temperatures may cause pet owners to assume pets don't need protection from intestinal parasites, heartworms and fleas. But fleas may find comfort on a warm pet or inside a toasty home. Consider the cost of diagnosing and treating fleas compared to the lower price of preventatives. What would a client spend for a physical exam, intestinal parasite test, skin scraping, preventatives and medication to treat a skin infection and tapeworms caused by pesky fleas? The total easily tops \$100 in most practices vs. a 12-month supply of preventatives. Break down the cost per day for year-round protection—it's typically less than 40 cents a day for a year's supply of preventatives.

Encourage senior screens. As “Mom” to a 21-year-old cat named Ollie, I know the value of detecting diseases early. Since his 8th birthday, Ollie has had twice-a-year wellness exams and annual blood work and urinalysis. Now testing is more frequent based on his advanced age. Our veterinarian also added an EKG and blood pressure check. Thanks to a therapeutic diet and daily subcutaneous fluids to manage renal disease, Ollie’s kidney function is effective for his age.

Offer senior blood work and urinalysis to every client with a senior pet. Catching diseases early offers more treatment options and is cost-effective long term. Isn’t it easier to manage early kidney disease than renal failure?



Conduct an annual heartworm test. You want to make sure preventatives are protecting patients and that clients are giving recommended doses. Leverage your heartworm test into a junior wellness profile. In communities where tick-borne diseases are prevalent, testing can identify problems before pets become symptomatic. At a Connecticut practice I consulted, they implemented a standard of care for wellness testing for both heartworms and tick-borne disease annually because one in four dogs was testing positive for tick-borne diseases. Through a combination of testing, Lyme vaccination and year-round tick preventatives, the number of infected dogs is declining.

Send clients home with a dental product. Pet owners understand the importance of professional dental cleanings. Don’t overlook the need for products they can use at home. Ask questions to assess the client’s commitment to providing home care such as:

- How much time do you have to spend on dental care at home for your pet?
- When is the most convenient time to do dental care at home in your schedule?
- Who is the primary caregiver for the pet?
- Would you like to stretch out the length of time between professional dental cleanings with easy home-care options?

Based on the client’s answers, offer a dental diet, drinking water additive, rinse, gels, chews or a combination of several home-care products.

Get obese pets started on weight-management programs. Excess pounds can lead to serious and expensive health problems. Help clients understand the calories they're feeding pets. The average dry dog food has 400 calories per cup. Here are pets' daily caloric needs:

- 10 lb. cat = 275 calories
- 10 lb. dog = 300 calories
- 20 lb. dog = 500 calories
- 50 lb. dog = 1,200 calories



Let's say you noticed a dog's dental disease during a wellness exam but the client declined a professional dental cleaning. The next time she's at the grocery store, she spots a Busy Bone dental chew. Sounds healthy, right? She buys the treat and believes she's helping her dog's dental disease. But a Busy Bone has 600 calories, which equals 1 ½ cups of dry food and is similar to the number of calories in a Big Mac!

Suggest low-calorie treats that your hospital sells as well as a weight reduction diet. Provide a free food measuring cup, which is available from pet food companies, to every puppy, kitten and overweight pet. Too often, clients use a scoop, coffee can or 32-ounce plastic cup. Did you know a Big Gulp cup actually holds 4 ½ cups of dry pet food?

Remember, weight management for pets has benefits for clients too. At Red Stone Animal Hospital in Littleton, Colorado, Dr. Jim Hailey told a client that his German shepherd needed to lose 6 pound to slow the progression of the older dog's arthritis. He explained proper portions and diet and recommend several walks a week. When the client returned for the dog's next wellness exam, he was beaming. "Doctor, the dog lost the 6 pounds you asked for and thanks to our daily walks, I've lost 30!"

Prevention is the best medicine in today's economy. What's good for the patient is also good for your practice!

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.