

Ways to Promote Microchipping for Every Patient

4 million pets are euthanized each year because their owners can't be found in time

By Wendy S. Myers



While walking on a chilly 12 degree morning, I saw a black Labrador retriever playing in the snow. He bounded over snowdrifts, flipping powder with his nose. I smiled at his playfulness and retreated inside. Two hours later, I spotted the same dog wandering through the neighborhood. I grabbed a leash from the front closet and rescued the dog from winter's bitter bite.

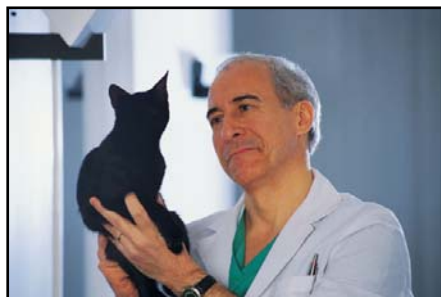
Glad to meet a new friend like most Labs, the dog followed me inside our toasty home. I wiped away ice between his toes and checked his collar for identification. Jake's tag had a California phone number. The rabies tag number was scratched beyond recognition. A microchip tag sandwiched between the two ID tags was damaged and unreadable. I dialed the California number first, which had been disconnected. Then I called the veterinary clinic on the mangled rabies tag. A receptionist encouraged me to bring Jake to their hospital so he could be scanned for a microchip.

"Jake, let's go for a ride!" I called. He bounded toward me, and I opened the car door. Jake's family must have had the "stranger, danger" conversation with him because he refused to get in my car.

Now 30 minutes into my rescue attempt, my next call was to Douglas County Animal Control. The officer said a family had called earlier about Jake, and she asked if they could meet me at my house to pick up their lost dog. Fifteen minutes later, Jake and his owner had a happy reunion at my front door. Before handing the leash over, I handed the owner my cordless phone with the microchip manufacturer's 800 number already dialed. "Please tell the operator your new phone number and address. You also can get a replacement rabies tag from your veterinarian, and Jake needs a new pet ID tag," I pleaded. Although Jake had been microchipped as a puppy, the family had not updated their contact information since moving to Colorado from California two years ago.

This true story had a happy ending but more than 1 million pets are lost or stolen every year, according to the California Veterinary Medical Association. One in three pets will get lost during their lifetime. Even our 20-year-old indoor cat Ollie has escaped three times, including pushing out a window screen and crawling onto the rooftop on a warm summer night. Luckily, we quickly found him after each of his misadventures. But other pets aren't so lucky. Without identification, 90 percent won't get home.

As a veterinary professional, you can significantly increase the number of microchipped pets and make sure owners have registered contact information. Implement these approaches for a successful microchip initiative:



1. Put microchipping on your checklist of topics to cover during puppy and kitten exams. A new collar and shiny ID tag are among the first purchases for new pet owners but only a microchip provides permanent identification. Explain what a microchip is and how easily it is inserted. Offer to do it today! If you provide puppy or kitten

packages with bundled services, add a microchip to group.

Remember to check shelter pets' paperwork because many organizations microchip animals when they are adopted. Record the microchip number in the patient's medical record and the client's computer record.

2. Offer a microchip with every surgery or dentistry. Add the option of a microchip to your anesthesia consent form. Timing is perfect for puppies or kittens that are being spayed or neutered. But every anesthetic event is an opportunity to offer a microchip.

When clients check in for surgery or dentistry, have a technician admit patients in the privacy of an exam room where the staff member can explain the anesthesia consent form, treatment plan (formerly called an estimate), when the patient will be ready to go home and additional services such as a microchip. Busy receptionists don't have time to fully explain the benefits and cost of microchipping. Compliance will be poor for microchipping, preanesthetic testing, pain management and other services pets need when you have rushed conversations over ringing phones and interruptions from multiple arriving clients.

3. Weigh and wand every patient at check-in. Weigh each patient at the beginning of an exam, and then scan for a microchip. Clients may ask, “What does that scanner do?” You respond, “I’m checking to see if your pet has a microchip.”

If the pet doesn’t have a microchip, say, “Our scanner did not detect a microchip, which is a rice-sized chip that’s injected under the skin between the shoulder blades and gives Jake permanent identification should he ever become lost. All veterinary hospitals and animal shelters have microchip scanners. Would you like a microchip for Jake today?”



If a microchip is present, say, “The scanner read Jake’s microchip number, which we also have recorded in his medical record and on the computer. Do you have your current address and phone number registered with the microchip manufacturer?”

Does “weigh and wand” work? One of our consulting clients sold 10 microchips the first day of implementing this check-in procedure. Make sure the microchip number also is entered in your veterinary software, especially for adult pets that received their microchips elsewhere.

4. Register microchips for clients. After you insert a microchip, have the client complete registration paperwork. Then you’ll mail it. About 40 percent to 50 percent of pet owners who get pets microchipped at veterinary clinics forget to enroll, according to the American Kennel Club. Missed registrations are only 5 percent at shelters because staff members have new owners complete microchip registration with adoption paperwork, then the shelter mails it. If the microchip manufacturer requires an additional registration fee, raise your price to include the microchip and registration.

Educate pet owners about the benefits of permanent microchip identification, whether an afternoon at the dog park or a natural disaster separates us from our best friends.

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.