

## Practice Tips – Client Education

### **Add Exam Report Cards to Improve Compliance and Follow-Up Care**

When a client leaves your exam room, how much does he or she remember? Research shows that we listen at about 25% of our potential—which means we forget, ignore, or misunderstand 75% of what we hear. You can provide clear instructions with a written exam report card that's given at the end of the appointment. Almost 80% of clients in the 2003 AAHA compliance study indicated they wanted instructions both verbally and in writing.

Your exam report card can note normal or abnormal findings as well as recommendations for nutrition, diagnostics, medications, and needed treatments or procedures. The report card can be computer generated or an NCR form, so one copy goes home with the client and the other stays in the medical record. Include “When the next visit is due \_\_\_\_\_” on the bottom of the report card to encourage the client to schedule the next appointment at checkout or to prompt the receptionist to enter a callback or postcard reminder. Exam report cards also help educate family members at home who were not present during the appointment and show value for the veterinary services provided.

For examples of exam report cards, order *The Veterinary Practice Management Resource Book* with a CD from Communication Solutions for Veterinarians. The book includes exam report cards, job descriptions, review forms, salary surveys, phase-training checklists, consent forms, boarding registration forms, a grooming report card, a client registration form, a phone shopper report, client satisfaction surveys, a checklist for opening client appointments, and more than 125 pages of helpful resources and a CD with electronic files. To download an order form, click on “Our Services” on our website ([www.mycommunicationsolutions.com](http://www.mycommunicationsolutions.com)).

### **Conduct Effective Risk Assessment During Wellness Exams**

A client with a senior indoor cat decides to welcome a stray kitten into her home. Another client with a lake house brings his Labrador Retriever for swimming as well as hiking in the woods. Are both pets at increased risk for exposure to diseases?

To practice effective risk assessment, ask questions during every wellness visit about the patient's lifestyle and environment. Then you can offer tailored vaccination protocols based on the individual patient's risk. Swimming in the lake and hiking in the woods could put the Labrador Retriever at risk for Giardia, Lyme disease, Leptospirosis and other diseases. A new stray kitten might expose an indoor cat to feline leukemia, respiratory and other diseases.

Examples of risk assessment questions include:

- When your pet goes outdoors, is it ever unsupervised?
- Does your pet come into contact with other pets or their environments?
- Is there wildlife in your area, including mice, squirrels, birds, possums, raccoons or skunks?
- Are there ticks in your area?
- Do you travel with your pet to areas where ticks or mosquitoes may be present?
- Does your pet have an opportunity to drink from standing water outdoors such as ponds or puddles?

To show value for the veterinarian's expertise and stress the importance of risk assessment, you might tell the client, “Based on today's exam findings and risk assessment, your pet needs the following vaccines. On our next visit, we will consider any changes that have occurred and then administer the appropriate vaccines. My goal is to protect your pet from infectious disease using the most current science and vaccine products.” To download a risk assessment form, visit the National Pet Wellness Month website at [www.npwm.com](http://www.npwm.com).

## **Create a Checklist of Discussion Topics for Puppy and Kitten Exams**

During puppy and kitten exams, doctors and staff can share advice that sets up a plan for lifetime wellness. If you're a multi-doctor hospital, are all doctors communicating the same advice to puppy and kitten owners? You can increase consistency and compliance by creating a checklist of discussion topics for puppy and kitten exams.

Staff members can handle the lion's share of client education, letting doctors focus on the physical exam, vaccinations, and diagnostic testing. Discussion topics can be a blend of conversations, brochures, and handouts. In addition to brochures from food and pharmaceutical companies, consider handouts that you can customize with your own logo and contact information such as Lifelearn's "Client Handouts, Small Animal Series" on CD ([www.lifelearn.com](http://www.lifelearn.com)). Stuff 8, 12 and 16 week folders with handouts and brochures in advance so they're always ready for puppy and kitten appointments.

Here are examples of puppy and kitten discussion topics:

### **Puppy Exam Discussion Topics:**

<b>8 weeks</b>	<b>12 weeks</b>	<b>16 weeks</b>
<p><b>Topics/handouts today:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Housetraining</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Puppy proofing your home</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Introducing your puppy to other family pets</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Pet ID tags, collars</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Socialization plan</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Desensitize to all over touching</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Biting and mouthing issues</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Vaccinations</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Parasite control and diseases that can transmit from pets to people (zoonoses)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Nutrition</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Behavior</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Training classes</li> </ul>	<p><b>Topics/handouts today:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Receive sample dental kit with finger brush and toothpaste and learn how to brush your puppy's teeth</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Grooming (fur, nails, teeth, ears)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Boarding recommendations</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Toys, exercise, playtime</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Veterinary Pet Insurance</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Nutrition</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Behavior</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Training classes</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Again: Socialization exercises</li> </ul>	<p><b>Topics/handouts today:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Spay/neuter at 4-6 months</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Fluoride treatment for teeth given at spay/neuter, also will check for all adult teeth and remove any remaining baby teeth</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Microchip for identification</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Heartworm preventives</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Nutrition, when and how to switch to adult dog food</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Weight control</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Grooming (fur, nails, teeth, ears)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Behavior</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Training classes</li> </ul>

**Kitten Exam Discussion Topics:**

8 weeks	12 weeks	16 weeks
<p><b>Topics/handouts today:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Introducing your kitten to other family pets</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Litter box education</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Kitten-proofing your home</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Pet ID tags, collars</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Socialization plan</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Desensitize to all over touching</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Biting and scratching issues</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Nail care (scratching posts, Soft Paws, tendonectomy, declawing)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Parasite control and diseases that can transmit from pets to people (zoonoses)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Nutrition</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Behavior</li> </ul>	<p><b>Topics/handouts today:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Receive sample dental kit with finger brush and toothpaste and learn how to brush your kitten's teeth</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Grooming (fur, nails, teeth, ears)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Boarding recommendations</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Toys, exercise, playtime</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Veterinary Pet Insurance</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Nutrition</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Behavior</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Again: Socialization plan</li> </ul>	<p><b>Topics/handouts today:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Spay/neuter at 4-6 months</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Fluoride treatment for teeth given at spay/neuter, also will check for all adult teeth and remove any remaining baby teeth</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Microchip for identification</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Nutrition, when and how to switch to adult cat food</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Weight control</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Behavior</li> </ul>

**Create a Checklist of Questions to Open Wellness Exams**



When a client arrives for her pet's wellness appointment, a technician can get a brief history and the pet's temperature, pulse and respiration. Use a checklist of wellness exam check-in questions so all staff ask clients the same questions every appointment—whether it's a busy Monday morning or slow Thursday afternoon. Laminate wellness exam check-in questions and use a dry erase marker. Transfer any abnormal or important information into the medical record.

Standardized questions help you provide additional wellness services and effective client education. Your first question should be to confirm the reason for today's visit, saying *"Your cat will receive his wellness exam, vaccinations and intestinal parasite screen today. Is there anything else you want to be sure to discuss with the doctor?"* This identifies any behavioral or medical problems at the start of the exam so the technician and doctor can prioritize what needs to happen during the appointment. For example, if the client says her cat has been urinating outside the litter box for two weeks, you would add a urinalysis to today's services. The technician could collect a sample and start the test before the doctor enters the exam room. Oftentimes, a doctor ends the exam by asking the client, *"Do you have any other questions?"* If she springs the inappropriate urination question during the last 30 seconds, you might run late for the next appointment in order to diagnose this last-minute problem.

Examples of wellness exam check-in questions include:

- ***"What heartworm preventative do you give your pet? What day of the month do you give it?"*** If the client can't answer these questions, discuss the importance of heartworm prevention and timely medication administration.

- **“What dental care do you provide at home?”** This prompts you to provide education on dental diets, treats, chews, rinses and home-care products your hospital offers.
- **“What food are you feeding your pet? How much do you feed? How often do you feed? What treats / snacks / table scraps / chews do you give your pet?”** This lets you talk about nutrition and weight management.
- **“Does your pet have a microchip?”** If yes, make sure you have the microchip number recorded in your computer and/or medical record and the client has her current contact information registered with the microchip manufacturer. If no, talk about the benefits of micro-chipping and offer to do it during today’s exam.

For a wellness exam check-in questionnaire, order *The Veterinary Practice Management Book & CD* from Communication Solutions for Veterinarians. [Click here for a printable version of the order form.](#) (Adobe Acrobat PDF file)

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## **How Every Team Member Can Reinforce Heartworm Prevention**

If your hospital’s protocol is that all pets need year-round heartworm protection, every member of the healthcare team can help reinforce this protocol and influence client compliance. Here’s how:

A receptionist asks clients upon check-in, “Do you need any heartworm preventives while you’re here today?”

In the exam room, the technician who opens the client appointment asks, “What heartworm preventives do you give your pet?” and “What day of the month do you give each dose?” This open-ended question seeks specific answers rather than the close-ended question, “Do you give your pet heartworm preventives?” If the client cannot name the brand and when the dose is given each month, the technician sees this is a problem with compliance and an opportunity for client education.

If a pet is boarding at our hospital, the kennel attendant might ask the client upon check-in, “Do we need to give your pet its heartworm preventive during the stay?”

With this approach, every team member echoes the wellness protocols that your doctors set. To attain this level of staff involvement and confidence, you need to invest in training. Invite a pharmaceutical representative to give a training session on heartworm disease and prevention. Also get guidelines from the American Heartworm Society at [www.heartwormsociety.org](http://www.heartwormsociety.org) and consider online classes on fleas, ticks, and zoonotic diseases at [www.vetmedteam.com](http://www.vetmedteam.com). A knowledgeable staff provides better service, increases client compliance, reinforces protocols and doctors’ recommendations, and, most importantly, improves the health of patients.

## **Improving Monitoring of Long-Term Medications**



You can improve medication monitoring with protocols set by your doctors, automated reminders in your veterinary software and colored labels on prescription vials. Pharmaceutical manufacturers recommend monitoring to ensure safe administration and to identify any side effects or potential complications or interactions with other drugs. Routine monitoring of pets on long-term medications also helps veterinarians establish a baseline for patients and detect any changes early so medication adjustments can be made.

To create your practice's protocols for medication monitoring, have doctors discuss the type and frequency of tests for arthritis, heart, seizure, thyroid, urethral incontinence and allergy medications. Many pharmaceutical package inserts and veterinary journals have suggested protocols your veterinarians can reference when developing your guidelines. For example, consider conducting liver and kidney function blood tests prior to administration of arthritis medication and repeat every six months.

When educating clients about long-term medications and monitoring, use both verbal and written instructions. Give clients the brochure, "Prescription Medications: Testing helps us choose the right medication—monitoring helps ensure lasting effectiveness" from IDEXX Laboratories. Explain why you need to conduct blood tests prior to drug administration as well as the intervals of routine retesting.

When the initial prescription for a long-term medication 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. When refilling the prescription and 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." Print sheets of florescent labels available at office supply stores and keep them in the pharmacy. With a postcard reminder and florescent label on the bottle, you'll help clients remember to schedule patients' blood tests for medication monitoring before the last pill is gone.

Protocols, automated reminders and stickers on prescription vials ensure your patients get the follow-up monitoring they need. 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.

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## **Organize Kitten Visits for Effective Education**



Do you attempt to cover every imaginable topic with a new kitten owner during the first veterinary visit? Chances are, your appointment will extend well beyond 20-30 minutes and leave the owner's head spinning with information overload. Instead, improve client education and compliance with a checklist of items to discuss during each of the three kitten visits. Have doctors and technicians work together to create discussion topics for 8, 12 and 16 week exams. Staff members should handle the majority of client education to maximize productivity and exam time.

To help guide clinics, I created puppy, kitten, adult and senior pet exam report cards with a checklist of client-education topics in my book, *The Veterinary Practice Management Resource Book & CD*. [Click here for a printable version of the order form.](#) (Adobe Acrobat PDF file. Discussion topics can be a mix of handouts as well as conversations. Organize handouts and brochures in a pocketed folder with your hospital logo, name and phone number. Label each folder "Kitten's First Visit: 8 Weeks," "Kitten's

Second Visit: 12 Weeks" and "Kitten's Third Visit: 16 Weeks."

Organizing materials in advance helps you make the most of exam time, provide written materials for clients to reference at home, and positions your veterinary hospital as the trusted resource for healthcare information.

Review certain topics such as diagnostics, behavior and nutrition in each kitten visit because these are building blocks for a healthy lifestyle. Here are sample discussion topics for kitten wellness exams you can adapt for your hospital:

**6-8 weeks:**

- Feline leukemia and FIV testing (Important to test prior to vaccination and to re-test for FeLV in 28 days and FIV in 60-day intervals)
- Vaccinations
- Strategic deworming (Get guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control at <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dpd/parasites/ascaris/prevention.htm>.)
- Intestinal parasite screen
- Introducing your kitten to other pets
- Litter box education
- Kitten-proofing your home
- Pet ID tags, collars
- Socialization plan
- Desensitize to all over touching
- Biting and scratching issues
- Nail care (scratching posts, Soft Paws, tendonectomy, declawing)
- Parasite control and diseases that can transmit from pets to people (zoonoses)
- Nutrition (food sample)
- Behavior

**10-12 weeks:**

- Feline leukemia and FIV testing
- Receive sample dental kit with finger brush and toothpaste and learn how to brush your kitten's teeth
- Grooming (fur, nails, teeth, ears)
- Boarding recommendations (especially if you offer this service at your clinic)
- Toys, exercise, playtime
- Pet insurance
- Nutrition
- Indoor vs. outdoor
- Behavior
- Again: Socialization plan

**14-16 weeks:**

- Re-test for Feline leukemia and FIV on kittens that tested positive before six-months of age
- Spay/neuter at 4-6 months and the importance of pre-anesthetic testing
- Fluoride treatment for teeth given at spay/neuter, also will check for all adult teeth and remove any remaining baby teeth
- Microchip for identification
- Nutrition, when and how to switch to adult cat food
- Weight control
- Feline heartworm disease
- Behavior

With a well-organized approach to kitten wellness exams, you'll have better educated clients, keep appointments on time and improve compliance for vaccinations, diagnostics and products.

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## **Take the Ouch Out of Osteoarthritis for Feline Friends**



When our Siamese-Manx cat was young, he could jump onto the ledge of an open door in a single bound. Ollie kept his youthful spry until age 17, when we noticed changes in grooming, increased vocalization and—the most obvious of all—he couldn't leap into your lap. Arthritis was deteriorating the health of his joints and causing pain.

Research shows 1 in 5 dogs has osteoarthritis but don't overlook our feline friends. September is National Senior Pet Health Month, the perfect time to focus on osteoarthritis awareness. Incorporate an arthritis exam into every comprehensive physical for older patients.

IDEXX and Antech laboratories offer senior pet questionnaires, posters and brochures with age-analogy charts and descriptions of diagnostic testing. Insightful questions include is your pet...

- having difficulty climbing stairs?
- having difficulty jumping?
- interacting less often with family?
- Exhibiting signs of increased stiffness or limping?

Clients' answers can help doctors diagnose osteoarthritis and offer solutions. As cats age, their joints become less flexible, impacting mobility and quality of life. Talk with clients about Restor-A-Flex, a daily supplement to maintain optimal joint health in dogs and cats by providing the raw materials involved in the synthesis of synovial fluid and the connective tissue matrix of skeletal joints. Restor-A-Flex is available from Fort Dodge Animal Health or your veterinary distributor. Cosequin for cats helps maintain healthy joints and offers chicken and tuna flavored capsules. Some veterinarians also recommend Cosequin to help maintain urinary bladder health.

After several weeks of nutraceutical therapy, Ollie could jump into his favorite chair again and in bed at night. Since Ollie became a senior pet at age 7, he's had twice-a-year wellness exams and regular diagnostic testing. Frequent veterinary visits helped us detect problems early and lengthened Ollie's life—*he celebrated his 19<sup>th</sup> birthday in July 2006!*

You also can get client-education materials on recognizing the subtle signs of sickness from The Healthy Cats for Life campaign. Sponsored by Fort Dodge and the American Association of Feline Practitioners (AAFP), the educational program teaches cat owners that changes in behavior or normal routine are the first signs of a potential disease or illness. You can download the AAFP Behavior Guidelines Report at [www.catwellness.org](http://www.catwellness.org).

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## **The Best Way to Discharge Hospitalized Patients**

Scheduling discharge appointments lets you review home-care instructions, how to administer medications or change bandages, answer clients' questions and—most importantly—avoid the 5:30 pm traffic jam at the front desk!



For better client communication during discharge, have a staff member talk with the pet owner in the privacy of an exam room. Explain services provided, home-care instructions and how to recognize signs of pain at home. Then the client can ask questions without the distractions and interruptions of front-desk activities.

For complex cases, consider presenting the invoice in the exam room. Then the client doesn't get sticker-shock at the front desk, and the technician or doctor who discharges the patient can answer questions about the cost of services

and medications in greater detail than a receptionist who was not directly involved with the patient's care. If the client has financial concerns, you also can address them in the privacy of an exam room and discuss payment options such as CareCredit ([www.carecredit.com](http://www.carecredit.com)). Once release instructions are complete, the technician says, "I'll meet you at the front desk with your pet." Removing the pet from the discharge appointment lets the client give you her undivided attention.

When a surgery or dentistry patient is discharged, always provide written home-care instructions for the client. Depending on the complexity of the case, a technician or doctor should discharge the patient and verbally review instructions and medications with the client. Written information helps the client follow home-care instructions, especially when other family members who were not present for the discharge are also responsible for the pet's care at home. In "The Path to High-Quality Care" (AAHA, 2003), the study found clients want verbal as well as written information.

Create templates of common home-care instructions on your computer and include your hospital's name and phone number in case the client or other family members have questions. Make sure home-care instructions are neat and easy to read. Keep electronic templates on your computer server, where staff and doctors can easily access them. A freshly printed copy off the computer is better than the 10,000<sup>th</sup> version off the copier!

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## **Weigh and Wand Every Patient at Check-in**

Hurricane Katrina separated thousands of pets from loving families. A blind man was forced to evacuate his New Orleans home—and leave behind his guide dog, Jacob. Volunteers circulated flyers and asked National Guardsmen to check James Mercadel's home, again and again. After multiple trips to the flooded neighborhood, National Guardsmen found Jacob waiting at home. A microchip confirmed they'd found Mercadel's beloved guide dog, and the pair were reunited at a Houston shelter.

You can 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. After you weigh each patient at the beginning of an appointment, use your microchip scanner to "wand" each pet. 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 one, it's the perfect conversation starter about the need for permanent identification. If a microchip is present, show the client the chip is working. Also confirm the client has current contact information registered with the microchip manufacturer, and be sure the microchip number is entered in your veterinary software.

Does "weigh and wand" really work? One of our consulting clients sold 10 microchips the first day of implementing this check-in procedure. By making "weigh and wand" part of your daily routine, you'll increase the number of pets with permanent identification and reunite best friends with their families.

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## **Is Fido Too Fat?**



When my neighbor asked about extra pounds her 8-year-old dog seemed to be packing on, I suggested a visit to the veterinarian. Given Maggie's age, a thyroid test and nutrition discussion was in order. Although thyroid test results were normal, Maggie's eating habits weren't. She inhaled her kibble each morning and evening, blinked her beautiful brown eyes to snag table scraps and demanded a cookie after every trip outdoors.

Today, 25% to 40% of pets are overweight, according to research from Hill's Pet Nutrition. When discussing pets' diets, ask clients:

- What food are you feeding?
- How much do you feed?
- How often do you feed?
- What kind of treats / snacks / table scraps / chews do you give your pet?
- And the most important question: How big is the cup?

Maggie was eating “three cups” of food a day—a 32-ounce Big Gulp from 7-Eleven was her food scoop. No wonder Maggie was packing on the pounds. She was consuming triple or more the recommended feeding guide. Keep measuring cups provided by pet-food manufacturers in the drawers of every exam room so you can send clients home with a true “cup.” You’ll get more clients serving the right portions among today’s super-sized menus. Communicate the benefits of weight management to clients. Tell them a 2003 Purina study conducted over 14 years proved a dog’s lifespan could be extended 15% or 2 years when maintaining its ideal body condition score.

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### **Put Food Measuring Cups in Every Exam Room**



If only dogs and cats had to face bikini season each summer, maybe they’d shed those extra pounds. Research from Hill’s Pet Nutrition Inc. shows 25% of dogs and cats are considered overweight or obese. Nutrition plays a significant role in managing wellness and diseases, so counsel clients on maintaining a healthy weight for their pets and recommending a specific food.

During wellness exams, ask clients what brand and how much food they feed their pets. A key question in your detective work is **“How big is the cup?”** It’s no surprise that many pet owners use a scoop or oversized mug that measures significantly more than an actual cup. The average dry dog food supplies 1,600 calories per pound of food or 400 calories per cup. Add in treats—which all clients give pets because food equals love—and the calories soon become too many. For example, a large Milkbone biscuit has 112 calories and 2 grams of fat. If a dog gets four biscuits per day that’s the equivalent of an additional cup of dog food.

To make sure clients feed pets proper portions, send them home with a pet food measuring cup. Pet food companies provide free measuring cups, which should be stored in every exam room drawer. You’re more likely to use this teaching tool when it’s at your fingertips. At one of the hospitals we consult, doctors and staff mark the level of food to feed on the cup with a Sharpe pen. If the amount is less than 1 cup, they cut the top of the cup off at the mark. This way generous pet owners don’t overfill the cup.

Print a personalized feeding guide and goal weight for individual patients using Hill’s feeding guide software at [www.hillsvet.com/feedingguide](http://www.hillsvet.com/feedingguide). The program features a feeding guide, weight-management program and product selection assistance.

Staff members should make follow-up calls to remind pet owners about weight checks to track their progress. Here’s a sample script:

*“This is Suzie calling from Myers Veterinary Hospital to remind you it’s now time for your pet’s monthly weigh-in to check progress on his weight loss. Please stop by our hospital this week for a weight check. We’re open (state your hours), so just come by at your convenience. It takes just a few seconds to get your pet’s weight,*

*and the receptionist will record it in your pet's medical record and the computer so the doctor knows your progress. We look forward to seeing you and your pet this week!"*

When patients go from obese to optimal weight, they'll experience better health. What's good for pets is also good for business. A 14-year study by Purina proved a dog's life span can be extended by 15 percent—nearly two years—by restricting diet to maintain ideal body condition.

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## **Are you overwhelming clients with too many choices?**



During a practice consultation, I observed a technician educating a client with a 10-week-old Schnauzer puppy. The technician presented a puppy folder loaded with information on house training, nutrition, socialization, dentistry, vaccines and flea and heartworm preventatives. For 15 minutes, she explained five brands of preventatives. The client smiled and nodded, waiting until the technician took a breath to ask, "Can't I just give my puppy the same preventative that my other Schnauzer takes?"

Besides overwhelming clients with too many options, you risk inventory consequences. Preventatives account for a significant portion of practice income and expenses. If you carry every brand on the market, you may suffer these consequences:

- You won't be able to take advantage of volume discounts.
- You'll need more shelf space to display and stock multiple preventatives.
- You'll have to display and restock more product brochures.
- You'll need to meet with multiple pharmaceutical representatives regularly to keep pace with promotions, pricing and merchandising units.
- You'll need to dedicate more time to staff training because everyone needs to know everything about every preventative you stock.
- You'll need a good tracking system to stay on top of inventory.
- You risk having expired preventatives on shelves for brands that don't sell well.
- Extra inventory could lead to theft or missing inventory.
- You'll confuse clients!

Limit preventatives to one or two brands. Pick the primary product you'll dispense—your first choice for all pets. This preventative gets prime placement in reception areas, pharmacy shelves and puppy and kitten kits.

While discussing preventative inventory at a recent seminar in Houston, Carol Lisk of Bay Glen Animal Hospital shared that their hospital switched to one exclusive brand. Staff members educated clients about the product's benefits and savings of purchasing a 12-month supply. Doctors also explained the decision in a website article at [www.bayglenvet.com](http://www.bayglenvet.com). Fewer than 10 clients questioned the change. Compliance accelerated more than 40% because of the consistent, clear message.

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