



## Promote Preventive Care With Effective Reminders

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### Meet your consultant



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### What you'll learn

- Financial potential of preventive care
- Which services and products to remind
- When to send reminders and which reminder methods to use
- Promote preventive care on social media

### Financial potential of preventive care

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Did you know that only 60% of dogs and 52% of cats had preventive care exams in 2013?<sup>1</sup> Without regular checkups, patients could be at risk for exposure to diseases and parasites. You'll also miss the opportunity to diagnose other health problems such as dental disease, obesity and arthritis. Regular preventive care exams can ensure the health of your patients—and the financial health of your practice.



Dog owners spend an average of \$208 for the adult canine preventive care visit, while cat owners spend \$186 for an adult feline preventive care visit, according to the *AAHA Veterinary Fee Reference*, 8<sup>th</sup> edition.<sup>2</sup>

**Adult dog spending:** Dog owners spend an average of \$208 for the adult canine preventive care visit, according to the *AAHA Veterinary Fee Reference*, 8<sup>th</sup> edition.<sup>2</sup> The adult canine preventive health visit total of \$207.65 includes a preventive care exam, DA2PP vaccine, 3-year rabies vaccine, Bordetella vaccine, Lyme vaccine, leptospirosis vaccine, canine influenza vaccine, fecal examination (centrifugation), Giardia antigen test, and heartworm test (occult/antigen).

**Adult cat spending:** The *AAHA Veterinary Fee Reference*, 8<sup>th</sup> edition, reports an average adult feline preventive health visit total of \$186.38.<sup>2</sup> This average includes a preventive care exam, 3-year rabies vaccine, fecal examination (centrifugation), FVRCP vaccine, FeLV vaccine, Chlamydia test, FeLV and FIV test, and heartworm test (occult/antigen).

Preventive care services and products generate 38% of income in veterinary hospitals.<sup>3</sup> Missing preventive care opportunities not only fails patients, it hurts the financial health of your clinic. As a veterinary consultant, I recommend that you measure your compliance to determine your current performance and then set a goal to grow an additional 20%. Our Compliance Coach report ([www.csvets.com/books/](http://www.csvets.com/books/)) analyzes 11 compliance areas for dogs and cats including client retention rate, preventive care exams, intestinal parasite testing, heartworm/tick testing, dentistry, flea/tick and heartworm preventative sales, and senior screens.

Below is a case study from a practice that we recently consulted. The practice has preventive care exam compliance of 44%. They need to grow it an additional 20% to 64%.

**Case Study: Economic potential of growing canine exam compliance**

Number of canine patients without preventive care exam in last 3 years	2,320
Number of canine patients with a preventive care exam in last 3 years	1,836
Total number of canine patients during 3-year period	4,156
Percentage of patients compliant with exams during this period	44%
Desired compliance percentage, increase additional 20%	64%
Potential increase in # of exams for 1 year (Total # of active dogs during 3 years divided by 3 years for annual average x 20%)	277
Average adult canine preventive care visit total	\$208
<b>Estimated increase in revenue</b>	<b>\$57,616</b>

Seeing an additional 277 dogs that are overdue for care will generate \$57,616 based on the *AAHA Veterinary Fee Reference* average canine preventive care visit total of \$208.<sup>2</sup> Remember, the additional income of \$57,616 is just to get these patients up to date on preventive care. You'll likely diagnose arthritis, obesity, dental disease and other health problems that require follow-up exams, treatments, medications and therapeutic diets.

Of the 277 canine patients, let's assume you diagnose dental disease and get 38% of clients to accept dental treatments. Compliance for professional dental cleanings is 38%, according to the 2009 AAHA study, "Compliance: Taking Quality Care to the Next Level." According to the *AAHA Veterinary Fee Reference*, 8<sup>th</sup> edition, the average dental case total is \$427.<sup>2</sup> If 38% of 277 canine patients (105 dogs) get dental treatment at an average of \$427 per procedure, the additional annual revenue would be \$44,835 and bring the total income for preventive care and dentistry to an additional \$102,451.



Make the 20% exam compliance growth goal manageable with weekly and monthly targets. Post scorecards on an employee bulletin board and update it weekly so team members see progress. To grow exam compliance 20%, you need to see just one additional dog per day if you're open 6 days a week.

Canine exam compliance (Rounded to nearest whole number.)	20% increase	Total needed annually	Results
Annual goal	277	889	
Monthly goal	23	74	
Weekly goal	6	19	
Daily goal (open 6 days a week)	1	1	

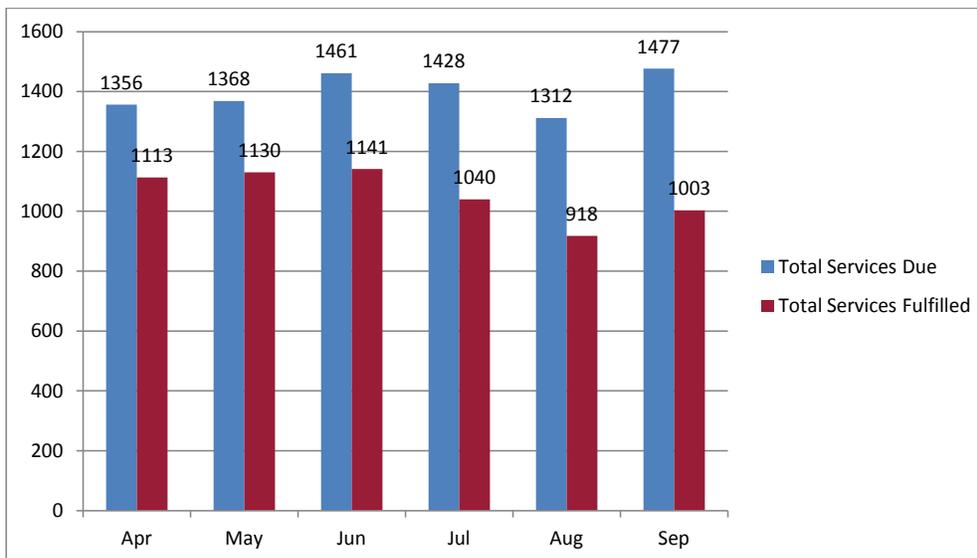
### Monitor reminder response rates monthly

Monitor response rates monthly to correct any short-term decline before it becomes a long-term problem. As a practice consultant, reminders are the No. 1 business growth strategy that I correct. Too many hospitals take the approach of "that's the way we've always done it" and aren't adapting their reminder methods or frequencies based on today's trends. Even fewer are watching their reminder performance.

Use reports in your practice-management software to view response rates every month. Watch for overall response rates and any emerging downturns. Target overall reminder response rate of 70%, once clients have received first, second and third reminders.

Here's an example of a reminder report from Vetstreet, which shows six months of comparison data:

**Total Services Reminded and Fulfilled**



This graph shows a six-month view of total number of services that came due and the number of services fulfilled.

Let's say you're the practice manager and view the report in September. This month's response rate is 68%, and you're close to the goal of 70%. Follow up with client care coordinators to ensure they're consistently making overdue reminder calls.



Let your team know they need to schedule an additional 30 appointments to meet the monthly goal. If you have five client care coordinators, each needs to book six exams for overdue patients. If your practice is open six days a week, that's only one overdue patient a day! Achieving this realistic goal not only improves patient care, it could have immediate financial benefits. According to the *AAHA Veterinary Fee Reference*, 8<sup>th</sup> edition, the average feline preventive care visit generates \$186 while a canine preventive care visit averages \$208.<sup>2</sup> If your team schedules 30 additional exams with 60% dogs (18 exams x \$208) and 40% cats (12 exams x \$186), the income potential is \$5,976.

## Which services and products to remind

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### Change your terminology

To help pet owners understand the importance of preventive care, the first step is to change your terminology. Replace “wellness exam” with “preventive care exam.” For example, I have two young, indoor cats. Caymus is 3 years old, and Opus is 4. If I’m a typical cat owner, I might assume that my young, indoor cats don’t need wellness exams. An American Association of Feline Practitioners and Bayer Healthcare study revealed that 52% of cats have not received a preventive care exam within the last 12 months.<sup>4</sup>

Clients may perceive wellness exams as optional, while preventive care exams are actionable—and pet owners want to keep their best friends healthy. So update your practice-management software, changing the description from wellness exam to preventive care exam. This will revise the term on invoices, treatment plans, and reminder emails and postcards.

Many practice managers and owners simply follow the default settings in their practice-management software for reminders. Without tailoring reminders to reflect your preventive standards of care, patients may not be getting optimal preventive care.

### Create distinct reminders

Have computer codes that separate preventive screens from sick-patient diagnostics. You need to distinguish the reason for testing because it influences future reminders and impacts the accuracy of compliance results.

Let’s say your hospital is located in New Jersey, where 1 out of 9 dogs is testing positive for Lyme disease in 2014, according to the Companion Animal Parasite Council ([www.capcvet.org](http://www.capcvet.org)). You perform an annual heartworm/tick test as a preventive screen, but use the same test when a sick patient visits with symptoms of tick-borne disease. When you run compliance reports to see what percentage of active dogs that have visited in the last 12 months have received a heartworm/tick test, the results may be inflated because preventive and sick-patient testing are in the same code. Instead, create distinct codes such as “heartworm/tick preventive screen” and “heartworm/tick test.” Having the word “preventive” in the first code shows it’s the correct code to use for annual visits, not a sick-patient workup. When you run compliance reports, it would search only “heartworm/tick preventive screen” and give you truly accurate results. Use the term “screen” in preventive care and “test” in sick-patient diagnostics.

Here are common diagnostic tests that need distinct codes, which drive reminders:

Preventive screen	Sick-patient diagnostic
Heartworm/tick preventive screen	Tick-borne disease test
Intestinal parasite preventive screen	Comprehensive stool test
Adult preventive blood and urine screen	Comprehensive blood test
Senior preventive blood and urine screen	Comprehensive blood and urine test
Preventive blood-pressure screen	Blood pressure analysis
Feline leukemia/FIV preventive screen	Retrovirus testing



**Professional services and products to remind**

<b>Reminder</b>	<b>Interval</b>
<b>PROFESSIONAL SERVICES</b>	
Pediatric preventive care exam	Every 3-4 weeks until 16 weeks old
Adult preventive care exam	12 or 6 months
Senior preventive care exam	6 months
Disease-management exam	3 months
Core vaccines	3 or 1 year based on your protocol
Non-core vaccines	1 year or based on your protocol
Grade 1 dental treatment	12 months
Grade 2 dental treatment	9 months
Grade 3 dental treatment	6 months
Grade 4 dental treatment	3 months
<b>DIAGNOSTICS</b>	
Intestinal parasite preventive screen	12 or 6 months
Heartworm/tick preventive screen	12 months
Adult preventive screen	12 months
Senior preventive blood and urine screen	12 or 6 months
Cardiopet <sup>®</sup> proBNP test	12 or 6 months
Pediatric feline leukemia/FIV screen	Before 6 months of age
Adult feline leukemia/FIV screen (indoor/outdoor or outdoor cats)	12 months or prior to vaccination
Preventive blood-pressure screen (senior pets)	12 months
Drug monitoring (Set based on drug)	6 months
<b>PRODUCTS</b>	
Heartworm preventative, 1 dose	Callback in 20 days
Heartworm preventative, 6 doses	5 months
Heartworm preventative, 12 doses	11 months
ProHeart, 6-month injection	5 months
Flea/tick preventative, 1 dose	Callback in 20 days
Flea/tick preventative, 6 doses	5 months
Flea/tick preventative, 12 doses	11 months
Seresto flea/tick collar, 8-month duration	7 months
Long-term drug refills	1 month prior or based on quantity purchased
Therapeutic diets	Callbacks at Day 3 and Day 30 when diet change is made, refill reminders every 4-6 weeks

**Disease-management exam:** Once you diagnose a pet with a chronic disease, switch the patient from preventive care exams to a disease-management exam code. Don't code everything under "office call" because you can't remind for various types of exams. The disease management exam code reminds quarterly. In a renal patient, one of the four exams might be like the traditional annual exam, while the second exam is simply a physical exam and urinalysis. The third exam includes a physical exam, senior preventive blood and urine screen, and blood-pressure screen. The fourth exam is another physical exam and urinalysis. Your doctors can create protocols for managing common diseases, and then design the frequency of exams and services to be delivered at each visit. More frequent follow up will let you provide optimal disease management.

### Improve drug monitoring for pets on long-term prescriptions

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 your practice's protocols for medication monitoring, have doctors discuss the type and frequency of tests for arthritis, heart, seizure, thyroid 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.

**Explain the need for drug monitoring when the first prescription is dispensed.** Give clients a brochure about the importance of drug monitoring, which are available from many reference labs. 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 Drug Monitoring" that has a six-month reminder. This code is entered in addition to the prescription. In six months, this code will trigger a reminder.



**Sample reminder message for drug monitoring:** <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 drug monitoring, which is required for future prescription refills. Please call us at 555-555-5555 for an appointment.

**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.

### When to send reminders

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Upgrade to weekly reminders. Abandon once or twice monthly reminder schedules. When you send reminders once a month, responding clients typically make appointments within a week. You have a tsunami of clients booking exams for 10 business days and then the schedule dries up like a drought with dozens of open slots. The next wave occurs when reminders go out. Revenue follows the high and low tides. Your goal should be to have a consistent schedule. Move to weekly reminders so you'll see a steady stream of clients booking appointments, even cash flow and less stress for staff and doctors.

#### Reminder schedule

1<sup>st</sup> reminder: Postcard / magazine and email sent 3 weeks before due date

2<sup>nd</sup> reminder: Postcard / magazine and email with urgent message sent 2 weeks after due date

3<sup>rd</sup> reminder: Phone call and email 3 weeks after due date to set up appointment

Reminder response increases when you combine postal and email reminders. Clients need to be reminded multiple times, multiple ways. Smartphone users frequently check email on their phones, letting them call your hospital immediately to make an appointment after receiving an email reminder. Research from Vetstreet shows reminder compliance is 31% higher when sending a combination of postal and email reminders.

### Get your reminders noticed



Imagine a pet owner opening her mailbox and finding a veterinary reminder with a photo of a yellow Labrador Retriever—the same breed she owns. Because the postcard is personalized to species and breed, it gets noticed. You can choose from 16 card designs, which include your clinic logo, contact information and social media icons. Vetstreet syncs with your practice-management software and customizes postal and email reminders to the species and breed. Clients with multiple pets that are due within two weeks of care can print on the same postcard, saving you the cost of sending individual notices. Email reminders include links to your website where clients can submit appointment requests that then appear in your Vet Portal. Email reminders also include links to your clinic's social media.

Vetstreet sends postcards weekly and emails daily, pulling data from your practice-management software so there's no need to export and upload a list of patients that are due or overdue for care. Small and large format cards are available. Before mailing postcards, clients' mailing addresses are verified against the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) national address verification database. If an address is undeliverable by the USPS, a postcard is not sent. When you log into your Vet Portal, you can view undeliverable addresses and correct them in your practice-management software so future reminders can be sent.



You can go beyond a postcard and send clients *Healthy Pet Magazine*, which features articles on preventive care for dogs and cats as well as seasonal topics to keep clients engaged. The outer magazine cover wrap can include up to five reminders for six pets. The cover wrap can feature a customizable letter from your clinic or breed-specific info such as a breed profile for a Beagle that describes common medical conditions, life stage information, and preventive care tips. Clients with senior pets can learn about common conditions as pets age and the importance of regular veterinary

### Collecting clients' emails

Industry research shows 30% of people change their email addresses annually,<sup>5</sup> and the average person has three email accounts.<sup>6</sup> How you ask for clients' email addresses matters. Don't say, "Can I get your email?" Instead, use benefit statements that will have them gladly volunteer their email addresses.

*"Our practice is sending more reminders by email. We want to be able to quickly notify you about any pet health alerts such as a pet food recall or rabies outbreak. You also can access Jake's health records and request appointments and medication refills through our website. Which email would be the best for you to receive Jake's reminders?"*

After three years of collecting clients' emails, most practices have captured 60% to 70%. Strive to get 70% or higher. Each month, monitor the number of emails you've collected and share results with your team.

### Email and text appointment confirmations

Remind clients of the time and date of exams. Email appointment confirmations include links to your website where client can access their Pet Portal and sign up for text appointment reminders.



When clients reply to appointment confirmations sent by text or email, responses appear in your Vet Portal. By knowing which appointments have been confirmed, you can focus your efforts on calling non-responders.

### **Make overdue reminder calls**

For the greatest success of booking exams, call clients when patients are newly overdue and have just fallen into the third reminder cycle. Because you'll need to speak with clients to make appointments, always call their cell phones first. Etiquette is to call between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m. If calling home phone numbers, dial between 5 to 7 p.m. on weekdays and 9 to 11 a.m. on Saturdays. You're more likely to catch clients arriving home during the workweek or on Saturday mornings before weekend errands.

If you get voicemail, leave this message: *"This is <your name> calling for the doctors at <Your Veterinary Hospital>. We're worried that Opus is past due for his preventive care exam, vaccines, diagnostic testing, and preventatives, and might now be unprotected. Will you please call us this week at 555-555-5555 to schedule his exam?"*

If you talk with the client, say: *"This is <your name> calling for the doctors at <Your Veterinary Hospital>. Opus is now overdue for his preventive care exam, vaccines, diagnostic testing, and preventatives. We're worried about his health. When is a convenient time for you to come in for an appointment this week? The doctor can see you at 6 p.m. Thursday or 9 a.m. Saturday. Which is more convenient for you?"*

The phrase "calling for the doctors" communicates that your veterinarians are aware of the pet's overdue status and are genuinely concerned. The warning of "may now be unprotected" is a call to action. Offer the next two available appointment times, which is known as the two-yes-options technique. This phrase is stronger than "Do you want to make an appointment?" which is a yes-or-no answer.

When describing overdue preventive care, focus on four categories:

1. Preventive care exam
2. Vaccines
3. Diagnostic testing
4. Preventatives

If you describe too many details during overdue reminder calls, the list could intimidate the client and she won't schedule an appointment. For example, simply say the pet is overdue for diagnostic testing rather than specifics such as an intestinal parasite screen, heartworm/tick screen, and senior preventive blood and urine screen. For additional training and scripts, visit [www.csvets.com/webinars](http://www.csvets.com/webinars) for information on our webinar on "Callbacks That Get Clients to Come Back," which is approved for 1 hour of CE credit.

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### **Use social media to promote preventive care**

As a veterinary consultant, I advise practices to focus on the top two social networks: Facebook and YouTube. Pinterest, Twitter and other social networks are still runts of the litter. Facebook's average user has 338 friends.<sup>7</sup> If your clinic gets 200 Likes, you tell 67,600 Facebook users about your clinic, which could generate referrals.

Repetition of the message gets results, so choose a medical theme each month with weekly postings. Consider topics that you discuss in exam room conversations, such as weight management, oral health, vaccines, diagnostic testing, intestinal parasites, heartworms, and arthritis. Having a monthly medical

theme will let you take a strategic approach to using social media. Always have three months planned in advance. For example, in January, you should have a social media content plan completed for January, February and March. Visit AVMA's website at [www.avma.org/Events/pethealth/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.avma.org/Events/pethealth/Pages/default.aspx) for pet health awareness events.

Month	Medical theme
January	Weight management
February	Dentistry
March	Flea and tick prevention
April	Heartworm testing and prevention
May	Allergies
June	Preventive care for cats
July	Pet safety (heat stroke, fireworks, need for microchip)
August	Vaccines (rabies and Lyme awareness)
September	Senior preventive care
October	Adult preventive screening (blood work, urinalysis)
November	Diabetes awareness
December	Arthritis awareness

Facebook advises posting at least once a week to keep people returning to your page. For more engagement, a better approach is to post three times per week. Vetstreet can post content on your behalf to your clinic's Facebook page three times per week, with postings at 12 p.m. EST. It's best to post daily, which can be easier if a vendor is helping with three out of seven posts each week.



**Post a "Preventive care patient of the day" photo on Facebook and create a wall album.** Each day, select a patient on tomorrow's appointment schedule that is visiting for preventive care. Put the patient's name or photo in a frame on the counter and share it on Facebook once you get the client's permission. Treat your patient of the day to a complimentary pedicure. The team at Advanced PetCare of Oakland in Clarkston, Michigan, chooses a "Preventive care patient of the day" who is pictured in a frame on the reception counter and on its Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/AdvancedPetCare](http://www.facebook.com/AdvancedPetCare)).

Get written permission from clients to post information. A simple statement will suffice: "I grant Your Veterinary Hospital permission to post my pet's picture, story and medical information on social media." Have the client sign and date the document. Use the term "social media" rather than stating which sites so you have flexibility about where to post.

Because YouTube is the second largest search in the world, create your hospital's own YouTube channel. Videos from channel subscriptions and personalized video recommendations appear on the user's YouTube homepage. YouTube sorts these videos based on what it thinks users will want to watch next. When uploading videos, complete the Settings and Info sections. This lets you include keywords in the Tags section and select the appropriate category. Give the video an accurate title and description to help people discover it.

Think of YouTube as the library on the Internet where you store all of your videos. Link to specific videos on your practice website, Facebook page and other social networks. Keep YouTube videos short, targeting 30 seconds to 2 minutes. Longer videos are OK, but short clips will generate the most traffic. Shoot videos with a smartphone or digital camera.



Here are easy YouTube videos to make:

- Doctor performing a preventive care exam (Watch Bakerstown Animal Hospital's exam video at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=YZvHdaIJ45s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YZvHdaIJ45s))
- Technician taking dental x-rays and veterinarian interpreting findings
- Preanesthetic testing in your in-clinic lab
- New equipment

Create these how-to videos. Be sure to feature technicians as well as veterinarians:

- Brush pets' teeth (Watch Kingsbrook Animal Hospital's video at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=iA6Vi3uEs-M](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iA6Vi3uEs-M))
- Apply flea/tick product
- Clean ears
- Give pills
- Trim nails

When you take a proactive approach to reminders, your hospital can provide better patient care while also ensuring your clinic's financial health.

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