Communications Solutions

Enhance the surgical experience for pet owners

By Wendy S. Myers, CVJ, President, Communication Solutions for Veterinarians

Pet owners may face multiple surgical experiences during their pets' lifetimes, from a one-time spay or neuter to recurring dental procedures. Your veterinary team needs to look at the surgical experience through clients' eyes and see how you could create encounters that establish trust and confidence in your professional services.

Here are easy-to-implement ideas that will comfort clients:

**Confirm procedures one day in advance.**

Phone calls set expectations and encourage clients to arrive on time so you can start procedures as planned. Call clients one day before procedures to remind them of fasting instructions and to allow ample time for check-in. Banish “drop off” from your vocabulary and hospital forms. “Drop off” implies the admission process will take seconds—hand you the leash or cat carrier and go. Instead of “drop off,” use the term “surgical/dental admission,” which is more professional and communicates there will be a check-in process.

Set expectations during confirmation calls so clients know how much time to plan for patients’ admissions. Say, “This is <your name> calling from <Your Veterinary Hospital> to remind you of <pet name>’s surgery tomorrow. Please withhold food after ___ p.m. tonight. Your surgical admission is at ___ a.m. with a technician, who will spend 15 minutes reviewing the consent form, answering your questions, and getting phone numbers where we can reach you the day of the procedure. We have emailed your treatment plan and anesthesia consent forms to <client email>. To speed your admission, you may bring these signed forms with you, or we are happy to answer questions during check-in. Please allow at least 15 minutes for <pet name>’s admission to our hospital. If you have questions, call us at 555-555-5555.”

**Email admission forms to clients when confirming procedures.**

After calling to confirm procedures, follow up with emails that include surgical paperwork. This allows clients to read consent forms, treatment plans and fasting instructions in advance and can help reduce the amount of time needed during check-in.

Here is a surgical confirmation email message: We are reminding you of <pet name>’s surgery tomorrow at <Your Veterinary Hospital>. Please withhold food after ___ p.m. tonight. Your surgical admission is at ___ a.m. with a technician, who will spend 15 minutes reviewing the consent form, answering your questions, and getting phone numbers where we can reach you the day of the procedure. I’ve

Max is awake and resting. Dental treatment went well. Discharge appointment at 4 p.m. Call Kathy with questions, 555-555-5555.

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attached your treatment plan and anesthesia consent forms. To speed your admission, please bring these signed forms with you, or we are happy to answer questions during check-in. Please allow at least 15 minutes for <pet name>’s admission to the hospital. If you have questions, call us at 555-555-5555.

A surgical text might say: <Pet name>’s surgical admission is tomorrow at ___ a.m. Please allow 15 minutes for check-in. We emailed you forms and fasting instructions. Questions? Call 555-555-5555.

Assign a “care pair” as the client’s personal contact on the day of surgery.

Did you know that one-third of people have a fear of anesthesia?¹ Anxious pet owners also may worry when their pets have surgical and dental procedures at your veterinary hospital.

To comfort clients, assign a “care pair” who will be each client’s personal contact on the day of the procedure. The “care pair” is typically the technician who admits the patient. Compare this experience to a human outpatient surgical center, where a nurse provides the majority of patient contact and supports the surgeon. The nurse is the bridge that connects the family to the surgeon, communicating when the patient can go home, escorting the patient to the car and confirming home-care instructions.

During the admission process, the “care pair” will review communication expectations for the day, double-check the best phone number to reach the client and provide a business card. Say, “I will be your pet’s ‘care pair’ for surgery today and your personal contact. I will call you after ___ p.m. to update you on <pet name>’s procedure. If you have questions before then, please call and ask for me. Here is my business card.”

Business cards are equally important for staff and doctors. Benefits of business cards include:
- Increases clients’ confidence in your medical team
- Helps receptionists quickly connect calls
- Boosts pride among staff
- May generate new clients when passed along

Watch my video on “The Importance of Business Cards” on my YouTube channel at www.youtube.com/csvets. Write a surgical admission appointment reminder on the back of the business card.

Call clients and text photos when pets have recovered from procedures.

Depending on the complexity of the case, the “care pair” or a veterinarian will call the client once the pet is recovered to explain the results of the procedure. If the client’s discharge appointment is later in the evening when the doctor has gone home, he may want to do the wakeup phone call in case the pet owner has questions. Texting communicates that your hospital is high touch and high tech. Add this statement to your anesthesia consent form so clients may check their preferred communication method:

| How would you like to hear from us when your pet wakes from the procedure?   |
|---------------------------------|------------------|
| Text (___) ____________________ |
| Email __________________________ |
| Call (___) ____________________  |

If a complication occurs, always call the client. Expect half of clients to choose text notification. Never use a practice cell phone to text clients because you can’t print texts to document them in medical records. Another danger: Clients may expect you to answer the practice’s cell phone 24/7.

Henry Schein Rapport Messaging allows on-demand messaging to clients by text or email. When texting recovery photos, show the technician lovingly cradling the patient in her arms.

As patients are recovered, surgical and dental technicians would use AVImark to send text messages to clients. Text messages should:
- Explain the patient is awake and resting
- Confirm discharge appointment time
- Include the technician’s name, which is personalized service and communicates who cared for the patient. Should clients have questions before discharge appointments, they know which technician to call. This lets the receptionist quickly connect the call.

When your team delivers a five-star experience, clients will have increased confidence in your professional services, refer new clients and return for future care.

For more training, order my webinar on “Creating the 5-Star Experience for Surgery and Dentistry” at www.csvets.com/cart/webinars/creating-the-5-star-experience-for-surgery-and-dentistry/. The webinar is for your entire hospital team and includes one hour of CE credit, unlimited playback, handout, test and CE certificate.

Reference:

About the Author
Wendy S. Myers, CVJ, owns Communication Solutions for Veterinarians in Castle Pines, Colo. She helps teams improve client service, communication skills and compliance through consulting, seminars and monthly CE credit webinars. Wendy is a certified veterinary journalist and author of 101 Communication Skills for Veterinary Teams. Her “Callers Into New Clients Course” teaches receptionists how to turn price shoppers into new clients. You can reach her at wmyers@csvets.com or www.csvets.com.