



Promoting Preventive Care with Effective Reminders

Webinar Presented by: Wendy S. Myers, Communication Solutions for Veterinarians

- Q.** How do you feel about the terms “recheck,” “brief,” “follow-up,” etc. when referring to a follow-up exam?
- A.** It’s best to use the term “medical progress exam” instead of “recheck.” From the client’s perspective, “recheck” sounds free and optional. Medical progress exams are follow-up to a previously diagnosed condition such as an ear or skin infection. Typically, a medical progress exam is charged at 75% of your exam fee. For example, if you charge \$50 for a preventive care exam, a medical progress exam would cost \$37.50.
- Q.** Do you recommend that "disease management exam" be the name of the follow-up exam/reminder instead of naming the exam using the specific disease, such as “cardiac progress exam” or “renal progress exam”?
- A.** Yes, use disease management exam for all chronic conditions. You could use cardiac, renal and others but then staff might get confused on which code to use. Think of all the chronic conditions that would be eligible for disease management exams: arthritis, renal, cardiac, Cushing’s, diabetic, skin, epilepsy, thyroid...the list could get overwhelming.
- Q.** How do you generate a reminded/fulfilled report?
- A.** Vetstreet customers can log into their Vet Portal and see their reminder report with 6-month trending that was featured in the webinar. Also check the reports in your practice management software to see what tracking is available. Report types will vary by software.
- Q.** What were the names of the books/references you recommended?
- A.** Dental reminders are available in my book, *The Veterinary Practice Management Resource Book & CD*, which is available at www.csvets.com/books. See page 10 of the proceedings for a complete list of sources discussed in the webinar.
- Q.** What day of the week is best to send reminders?
- A.** If you mail your own reminders, aim for clients to receive them mid-week. Many practices see an increased number of sick patients and emergencies on Mondays, Fridays, and Saturdays. Because local mail delivery usually takes 1 to 2 days, don’t mail reminders on Friday when they’ll land in clients’ mailboxes on Saturday. Clients who call immediately to schedule appointments may experience extra holding time, or your practice may be closed on Saturday afternoons. Instead, mail reminders on Monday or Tuesday. Clients will receive the reminders on Tuesday or Wednesday, when you can handle calls more quickly. Your team’s time can be better spent serving patients and clients instead of spending hours printing, stamping, proofing, and mailing reminders. A better option is to outsource your reminders to a service such as Vetstreet.

- Q.** We like the suggested wording for reminder name (screen versus test), but many of the names are very long and we run into problems with names being cut off by the software system. Do you have any suggestions?
- A.** Most names should fit: heartworm/tick screen as an example. If names are too long, consider abbreviations such as Sr Preventive Screen.
- Q.** How do you get around naming the same tests differently for send-out testing regarding the text code? AVImark will not let us use the same test code, and we use IDEXX lab interface and test names coded to their names and codes.
- A.** You should be able to create distinct laboratory codes that distinguish preventive screens from sick-patient workups. For example, a heartworm/tick preventive screen is performed annually on dogs, but a heartworm/tick test is run on dogs that presents with symptoms of tick-borne disease. Contact technical support at AVImark and IDEXX. They should be able to give you a solution that will work within your system. I regret that I can't answer software-specific questions as my hospital does not use AVImark.
- Q.** The biggest problem we have is staff compliance with new ideas. Do you have any advice on how to sell new things to staff?
- A.** You have to explain the "why" behind the change. Have your staff listen to this recorded webinar and share the proceedings. The concepts presented are best practices. Remember, veterinary medicine is constantly evolving. The knowledge base doubles every 5 years, so our teams must be committed to lifelong learning. Likewise, we need to update business practices so we can better serve clients and patients. When setting goals with staff, post numbers on an employee bulletin board and update results each week. Let's say you're trying to increase the number of senior preventive screens performed and your monthly goal is to perform 50 screens. Every Friday, post the results so your team can see its progress. As a practice consultant, I find that teams often meet or exceed goals when you communicate regularly. Also consider a team celebration or staff bonuses when you reach a goal.
- Q.** So a healthy pet that is on heartworm prevention and comes in for a dental cleaning will get three reminders—preventive care exam, oral assessment, and heartworm prevention?
- A.** Yes, but the three services may be purchased at different times. Let's say the annual exam is in January and the client buys a six-pack of heartworm preventive. A reminder to refill the heartworm preventive would be sent in May, when one tablet remains. A grade 1 dental treatment may be performed in February, with the reminder for a follow-up oral assessment sent 12 months later. The annual exam each January would remind 3 weeks before the due date. Remember, services such as Vetstreet sync with your practice management software and combine reminders that are due 2 weeks prior and 2 weeks overdue. Some reminders might be combined on the same postal and email notices depending on the due dates. Most practices are significantly under-reminding their clients. Reminders should reflect your standards of care and encourage continual care (e.g., no breaks in heartworm prevention).
- Q.** Shouldn't we be using email reminders more than postal reminders?
- A.** You need to use a combination of postal and email reminders because research shows a 31% higher response rate when using both. I might get a postcard, set it aside, and then next week get an email that prompts me to call to make an appointment.

- Q.** How often do we remind owners of vaccines if they haven't booked yet?
- A.** Send a total of three reminders, on this schedule:
 1st reminder: Postcard/magazine and email sent 3 weeks before due date
 2nd reminder: Postcard/magazine and email with urgent message sent 2 weeks after due date
 3rd reminder: Phone call and email 3 weeks after due date to set up appointment
- Q.** What are your thoughts about the timing of reminder calls?
- A.** Most practices don't have the ability to call every client for every reminder. The average two-doctor practice sends 500 reminders per month. Does your team have time to make 500 calls? That's 21 calls per day if you're open 6 days a week. That's why it's best to use postal and email reminders, limiting phone calls to third reminders only.
- Q.** Do you only make calls for overdue services?
- A.** Yes.
- Q.** We have never charged for preventive care exams/office visits. What is the best fee structure to begin charging for these exams that our current clients will accept?
- A.** Use the term "preventive care exam." Doctors need to communicate value by verbalizing their exams. Also consider using an exam report card. According to *The Veterinary Fee Reference* (8th edition, published in 2013 by AAHA), the average adult preventive care exam costs \$43. You also may need to review your vaccine fees. Separating exam fees from vaccine charges shifts the value of your professional services. After all, clients can buy vaccines from Internet pharmacies, feed stores, and other sources.
- Q.** How do you price disease management exams and pediatric preventive care exams?
- A.** According to *The Veterinary Fee Reference* (8th edition, published in 2013 by AAHA), the national average for a pediatric preventive care exam is \$42. Because disease management exams are a new concept, I would price them the same as an average adult preventive care exam, which is \$43.
- Q.** If we do not have exam codes other than sick visits and do not charge exam fees with preventive care visits, what is the best way to start implementing preventive care exams?
- A.** Create the exam codes featured in the webinar and use the corresponding reminders:
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| 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 |
- AAHA offers some great resources for promoting preventive care. Visit www.aahanet.org/Library/Preventive_Healthcare_Resources.aspx
- Q.** Do you think it is worth advertising on Facebook?
- A.** Yes! Set a budget and try it. My own practice regularly uses Facebook ads.
- Q.** How often do you recommend posting to Facebook?
- A.** Daily. Vetstreet can post to your clinic Facebook page three times a week if you're a customer.

- Q.** How do you feel about giving clients free services or free products? Does this help secure them as clients?
- A.** If you're going to do a free new client or shelter pet exam, you need to track it to determine your return on investment. Create a code: complimentary shelter pet exam. Then you can run a report to determine how many of these exams you performed and also track the retention rate of those clients. Be sure the invoice item description communicates the value of the free exam, such as "Complimentary shelter pet exam, a \$42 value." Otherwise, free is free.
- Q.** What is the best way to collect email addresses to communicate with clients?
- A.** See page 7 of the proceedings, which states: Industry research shows 30% of people change their email address annually, and the average person has three email accounts. 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. For example, "*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 3 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.