

Get Clients to Say “YES!” to Preanesthetic Testing

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A client arrives at 7:30 a.m. to admit her dog, Ginger, for a professional dental cleaning. A receptionist hands her an anesthesia consent form and pen, and then excuses herself to answer the ringing phone. The second line rings while another client arrives to drop off her cat, Whitney, for a spay. Juggling too many clients and phone lines leaves the receptionist feeling frazzled—and both clients declining preanesthetic testing.

When you tell clients to “drop off” surgery and dentistry patients, the term implies the admission process will take seconds. Clients assume they can hand you a leash or carrier and dash off to work. But it honestly takes 10 to 15 minutes to review the consent form, answer questions about preanesthetic testing, gather phone numbers and confirm what time the pet will be discharged. Instead of a “dump at the desk” approach to surgery and dentistry, consider these strategies to improve client compliance for preanesthetic testing.

DISCUSS PREANESTHETIC TESTING WHEN THE PROCEDURE IS RECOMMENDED.

When the doctor says Ginger needs a professional dental cleaning, he should discuss the benefits of preanesthetic testing. The doctor might say, “We will perform preanesthetic blood tests to

ensure Ginger is in good health prior to surgery. Blood work is an ‘internal exam’ that checks her organ function and gives us a better understanding of red blood cell, white blood cell and platelet parameters to help us identify any unknown diseases or potential health risks before we administer anesthesia. Plus, we’ll have a baseline as part of Ginger’s medical history so we can measure her future health status more easily and identify subtle changes early. If Ginger’s test results are within normal reference ranges, we

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will proceed with confidence. If results aren’t within normal reference ranges, we can alter the anesthetic procedure or take other precautions to safeguard her health and reduce the risk of possible complications.”

Explain that you’ll perform preanesthetic testing the morning of the procedure on

a fasted blood sample so you have the most accurate and up-to-date results. Clients should read and sign paperwork before their next visit. When clients arrive for their check-in appointment, you can draw blood and answer any questions. You’ll know clients have all the information they need, and they’ll feel confident that you’re providing the best care possible for their loved one.

INCLUDE PREANESTHETIC TESTING IN EVERY TREATMENT PLAN.

The term “estimate” implies money, while “treatment plan” focuses on needed medical care. Whether you recommend or require preanesthetic testing, include it in *every* treatment plan. Give clients the IDEXX brochure, “Anesthesia and Your Pet: Why Testing Is Necessary.” Staff members can explain the benefits and costs of preanesthetic testing when reviewing the treatment plan. It’s best to remove doctors from the money conversation because they make recommendations based on medical need, not the cost of care. Consider three categories of preanesthetic tests such as healthy animals under age 1, healthy adult pets age 1–7, and senior pets over age 7 or patients with illnesses or chronic diseases. You can build templates in your veterinary software for commonly recommended anesthetic procedures by age and health categories.

SCHEDULE ADMISSION APPOINTMENTS.

If your practice is like most, you ask clients to “drop off” pets for surgery and dentistry in the early hours your clinic is open. Murphy’s Law will have everyone arrive at once, and receptionists who are answering the flood of morning calls must stop to collect signatures on consent forms, quickly explain preanesthetic testing and get phone numbers where clients can be reached that day. You drop off your dry cleaning—not a beloved family member for surgery. Hurried clients might decline preanesthetic testing because you haven’t dedicated the necessary time to explain the importance and cost of diagnostic testing.

Remove “drop off” from your vocabulary and forms. You can deliver a higher level of service and increase compliance for preanesthetic testing with admission appointments. Create a technician column in your appointment schedule and designate a surgery or treatment technician who will admit these patients. Admission appointments typically take 10 to 15 minutes. Front-load the schedule with the most complex cases checking in first. If your practice has five anesthetic procedures tomorrow, schedule a Grade 4 dental cleaning for admission at 7:30 a.m., the lump removal at 7:40 a.m., a spay at 7:50 a.m., a Grade 2 dental cleaning at 8:00 a.m. and a cat neuter at 8:10 a.m. All of your patients will be checked into the hospital with enough time for presurgical exams and preanesthetic testing. If you instead tell clients to “drop off” between 7:30 and 8:30 a.m., a few might stroll in after 9:00 a.m. and domino the game plan for the day’s surgeries, causing stress on both the staff and patients. Because patients undergoing complex procedures arrive first, they also have more time for recovery and for you to prepare go-home medications and instructions.

When making surgery reminder calls, you might say, “This is Sharon calling from Myers Veterinary Hospital to remind you of Ollie’s surgery tomorrow. Please withhold food after 8:00 p.m. tonight. Your surgery admission appointment is scheduled for 7:45–7:55 a.m. with a technician, who will spend 10 minutes reviewing the consent form, answering your questions and getting numbers where we can reach you the day of surgery. **Please allow at least 10 minutes** for Ollie’s admission to the hospital. If you have questions, please call us at 555-555-5555. We look forward to seeing you and Ollie tomorrow morning at 7:45.”

MAKE PAPERWORK EASY FOR YOU AND YOUR CLIENTS.

Some practices put client consent forms, patient history forms and handouts on their Web sites. When making surgery confirmation calls, direct clients to your Web site using benefit statements. For example, “Mrs. Myers, I’m calling to confirm Ollie’s surgery admission appointment tomorrow at 7:45 a.m. You can visit our hospital’s Web site at www.yourwebsite.com to download, print and sign your surgery consent form and patient history form if you haven’t already done so. You also can read our brochure that explains preanesthetic testing. This will speed Ollie’s admission to the hospital in the morning. We’d prefer that you have Ollie’s paperwork ready when you arrive tomorrow.” To get a PDF file of IDEXX’s preanesthetic testing brochure to put on your hospital’s Web site, visit www.idexx.com/prean.

Another option is to provide paperwork when the procedure is recommended. Create a preanesthetic folder for anesthetic events. Personalize this pocketed folder with a label with your hospital logo and contact information. The folder contains a preanesthetic testing brochure, surgery appointment

card, consent form with fasting instructions, patient history form and handouts on laser surgery, pain management or related services. Present the folder when the recommendation is made so the client can share information with family members at home and make decisions before the morning of surgery.

PRAISE THE BEHAVIOR YOU WANT.

Lastly, praise clients who choose preanesthetic testing for their pets because what gets rewarded gets repeated. Say, “Mrs. Myers, you made the right decision by choosing preanesthetic testing for Ollie. Now we’ll minimize any risks from anesthesia and also have a baseline for future reference. The tests we perform today will become part of Ollie’s medical history.” In addition, you should provide them with a copy of the IDEXX Physical Exam Form including the high-level summary of their pet’s diagnostic test results or, perhaps the “Congratulations! Your Pet is Healthy” report card. By keeping your clients informed and engaged in the process validates your commitment and willingness to partner with them on safeguarding their pet’s future health and well-being.

With savvy approaches to client education and compliance, your patients will experience a higher level of care and your practice will enjoy the medical and financial benefits of preanesthetic testing.

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