

How to integrate preanesthetic testing into your practice

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Dr. Dennis McCurnin is a professor of veterinary surgery and management at the School of Veterinary Medicine, Louisiana State University.

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Veterinarians are sometimes unsure when it comes to the business side of their practices, according to Dennis M. McCurnin, DVM, MS, DACVS. Dr. McCurnin is professor of surgery and management at the School of Veterinary Medicine, Louisiana State University. He is best known for teaching practice management to veterinary medical students and practicing veterinarians.

“Running a clinical practice is running a business. As with any enterprise, you need to present the service professionally and confidently, and know how to handle objections to make the sale. And, like any other business person, you have to understand you are selling your professional knowledge and services to compete and make a good living,” McCurnin says.

Diagnostic services should be presented to the client as a teacher presents information to students. The teacher (veterinarian) must educate the student (client) about the value of diagnostic tests. The best practices are run by veterinarians who are outstanding teachers. Once a veterinarian educates the client, the diagnostic program sells itself.

Here are six tips McCurnin offers to get preanesthetic testing programs off the ground.

1. MAKE PREANESTHETIC TESTING A CLINICWIDE PHILOSOPHY.

The practice owner, associate veterinarians, technicians and receptionist must all understand why preanesthetic testing is good for the patients, the clients and the practice.

The Four Primary Reasons For Testing Are:

- a. It helps determine that the patient’s kidneys and liver are functioning properly in order to handle anesthesia.
- b. It ensures that the blood can carry adequate oxygen to tissues to stop bleeding and fight infection.
- c. It identifies pre-existing, congenital or occult conditions not evident from a physical exam, which may hinder the patient’s ability to handle the procedure.
- d. It establishes a baseline of values to compare with post-surgery conditions and future examinations. This baseline information is also the foundation for a future geriatric program.

2. AGREE ON THE “WHO” AND “HOW” OF PRESENTATION TO THE CLIENT.

The most effective method is to have the veterinarian personally present (teach) the benefits of blood testing to the client. Whether the veterinarian, technician or receptionist makes the presentation, it is important to communicate why blood tests are important and that you recommend them. Support materials with pictures may be helpful, such as a brochure, poster or other literature.

3. CONSIDER USING A FORM.

You will no longer give the client an option for preanesthetic testing—you will simply require the blood work. This puts you, the veterinary professional, in the medical decision-making role, which is what the client is relying on you to do. Using a customized form that highlights the need for the tests and the importance of the blood work makes it easy for the client to agree that you're making the right choice for the pet. The client will want to partner with you to provide the best care possible. That way, everyone shares in the ownership of the decision and has peace of mind and confidence to proceed when they learn the pet is healthy.

4. BE PREPARED TO HANDLE OBJECTIONS.

Once the medical benefits are presented, often the only remaining objection will be financial. It is important to work together as a medical staff to reinforce the need for a complete diagnostic workup to adequately determine the health status of your patient. Make your medical recommendations with conviction—you can always adjust your charges for a young, well-patient workup versus a sick patient or a senior patient—you have the control. In addition, payment plans can also ease both the financial and emotional burden on clients.

5. PRESENT RESULTS TO THE CLIENT.

Most of your clients will want to know the results, just as they would if they were their own blood tests. Take a moment to go over results with the client and explain what the various values indicate. This is especially important when abnormalities show up.

6. KEEP A POSITIVE ATTITUDE.

We should always keep a positive attitude about practicing high quality medicine. Practice with conviction and maintain a positive view of yourself and your client. Be confident that you have given your patient the best possible care.

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