

## Lifelearn's Compliance Series



### Compassion, Compliance, and Comprehensive Care: Putting it All Together for Optimum Patient Care

By: Robin Downing, DVM

Irving Townsend said, "We who choose to surround ourselves with lives even more temporary than our own live within a fragile circle, easily and often breached. Yet, we still would live no other way." And Leon Bernard, a French physician from the 15th century said, "Medicine should be practiced as a form of friendship." These are both core concepts that should remind veterinarians and veterinary healthcare team members why the work we do is so important.

The most recent studies of pet owners consistently report that 75 - 80% of pet owners think of their pets as children (References 1 & 2). The 2004 AAHA Pet Owner Survey (Reference 3) revealed that 94% of the respondents think their pet has human-like personality traits, such as being emotional or sensitive, outgoing, inquisitive or stubborn. For the veterinarian and the veterinary healthcare team, this means job security! Our moral imperative as veterinary health care providers is to advocate on behalf of a being who cannot advocate for itself. And this imperative takes on new urgency when we understand that our patients are living longer - - and better!

There are often barriers to appropriate patient care. Clients may not understand how best to prevent disease and other medical problems. They may attribute a loss of previously normal behaviors to the pet "getting old". Finally, they may simply not notice a medical problem early - - before it interferes with the pet's activities of daily living. It is the veterinary health care team's responsibility to provide comprehensive pet care information, as well as providing recommendations for maximizing health and wellness with conviction. The veterinarian and veterinary healthcare team members must assess each and every patient who enters the practice thoroughly, looking for any evidence of a problem too small for the pet owner to notice.

For example, unrecognized, untreated, and unmanaged pain compromises the pet's quality of life, and interferes with the relationship between the pet and the family. Putting a pet's chronic pain on the family and veterinary "radar screen" allows for positive intervention to restore and sustain the pet's activities of daily living.

The 2003 AAHA Compliance Study (Reference 4) revealed that overall compliance in veterinary medicine is abysmal. Every area studied demonstrated poor compliance. We must look to the study to create strategies for success. The Compliance Study evolved from a unique partnership between Hill's Pet Nutrition, Inc. and the American Animal Hospital Association. A multi-year project with a million-dollar-plus commitment, this was the first comprehensive, statistically valid compliance study conducted in veterinary medicine. The study revealed that millions of dogs and cats are not in compliance with veterinary recommendations.

The Compliance Study clarified that "Compliance" = "Recommendation" + "Acceptance" + "Follow Through" (think "CRAFT" equation). The veterinarian does NOT function in a vacuum, so enhancing compliance and patient care requires a consistent and coherent message from every single member of the veterinary health care team. Credibility depends upon the client having a consistent experience with compliance messages. Effective recommendations require consistent communication, and that means both specific protocols as well as effective, ongoing training.

Compliance in the "old days" meant "Did the client do as he or she was told?" A compliance failure meant the client failed. This attitude is a problem because, in the long run, if problems are not prevented or resolved, there may be more issues to deal with. Less than optimal outcomes for the patient lead to diminished satisfaction for the client and decreased job satisfaction for the veterinary healthcare team. Ultimately, the pet does not receive the care we know is best for it. So, what do we do?

#### Steps to Improved Compliance:

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1. Begin at the beginning
2. Make a decision and act on it
3. Train, train, train
4. Train some more
5. Get over your reluctance to ask clients for money
6. Track your compliance efforts
7. Get everyone involved
8. Uncover "compliance enhancers" in your practice
9. Commit to advocacy on behalf of a being who cannot advocate for itself

### Step One: Begin at the beginning

Recent surveys consistently report that 75 - 80% of pet owners think of their pets as children (Reference 1 & 2), so don't fail to plan. How does your team address your patients' needs? Develop your practice's protocols for delivering medical services. Your clients want what's best for their pets!

### Step Two: Make a decision and act on it

Compliance in delivery of pet care will not happen until YOU (the practice leader) decide compliance is important. You can practice high quality medicine OR low cost medicine - - not both.

### Step Three: Train, train, train

Internal communication is as important as communication with clients. Protocols answer two questions: "How do we do things here?" and "How do we talk to clients about how we do things here?" Everyone on the team must be adequately trained to present patient care plans. Everyone on the team must be capable of providing appropriate support and follow-up with clients to sustain compliance with health care recommendations.

### Step Four: Train some more

You can over-train for a marathon, but you cannot over-train a veterinary team in communication! Your protocols will create consistency of experience - - and the comfort of consistency - - for the team, for the client, and for the patient. And as protocols are designed to be dynamic documents, remember to update and modify them as the practice of veterinary medicine changes.

### Step Five: Get over your reluctance to ask people for money!

According to the Compliance Study, fewer than 10% of clients object to cost. Provide for your patients' needs, articulate these needs to the pet owner, deliver recommendations with consistency and specificity, and charge appropriately for everything that is done. Don't forget the 80/20 rule of business - - 80% of revenues are typically generated by 20% of clients.

Earl Nightingale said, "If you have fun doing what you do, people will have fun spending their money with you." So, have fun practicing the very best medicine, and keeping your clients on the right track with the care they provide to their pets!

### Step Six: Track your compliance efforts

What gets measured gets done! Choose the areas in which your practice will excel. For instance, track how many patients receive a diagnosis of back or limb pain, and then track how many patients receive medications used for chronic pain, including ongoing refills. Another option is to commit to making a nutritional recommendation for every patient, and then track the ongoing purchase of the recommended products. These are just two examples of measuring for success.

### Step Seven: Make compliance and improved pain management fun

Get the entire team involved in keeping ongoing care on the radar screen. Attitude is everything. Dan Clark said, "We cannot afford to have even one negative employee around to contaminate and influence healthy, positive employees." And business leader Bob Boylan said, "Weed out the non-believers - - they are neither wrong nor dumb if they don't agree with you. They're just on the wrong boat going in the wrong direction."

### Step Eight: Uncover "compliance enhancers" in your practice

Don't reinvent the wheel. Compliance enhancers include reminders - - written, phoned, e-mailed. Conduct a compliance review of medical records before the client and pet arrive. Make specific recommendations (oral & written) for the best interest of the pet. Ensure that medications and services that are recommended specifically are readily available to the client in the practice (e.g. pain medications, nutritional products, etc.). Schedule follow-up rechecks, recalls, or reminders before the client leaves.

### Step Nine: Commit to advocacy on behalf of a being who cannot advocate for itself

Your clients want what's best for their pets - - the Compliance Study merely confirms that. Advocacy on behalf of a being that cannot advocate for itself sustains momentum. Just as consumers purchase from emotion, focusing on improving patient care empowers team members to advocate from their emotional connection with those patients. The revenue side of this takes care of itself...

Veterinary medicine can be the most fun, exciting, and rewarding profession on the planet! Make a difference in the lives of pets and the people who love them by making compliance an ongoing

commitment for your healthcare team!

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#### References:

1. 2002 AAHA Pet Owner Survey
2. 2005-2006 APPMA (American Pet Products Manufacturers Association, Inc.) National Pet Owners Survey
3. 2004 AAHA Pet Owner Survey
4. 2003 AAHA Compliance Study

## webDVM® - Get the Attention of Search Engines



Search engines work by searching web sites on the World Wide Web (WWW) via a method called "crawling". They essentially navigate through the WWW by looking for links to pages within *your* site and links to *other* sites. The search engine then stores (caches) these pages on their own servers which subsequently become referenced in new searches.

In the past, older versions of search engines would search for keywords (stored in your site as "metatags") as their method of searching and cataloguing. Search engines now stay current on new information by using "crawlers" making the meta search method outdated and no longer a feasible solution.

Search engines stay current by constantly crawling through web pages, usually starting with the home page. If pages are not updated, the search engine will not cache (store) that page as it already has a cached version of the page from the last time it crawled through it. Older cached information then tends to be given a lower ranking than newer updated searched pages. If the page has been updated, the search engine will cache that page and then proceed to crawl through all the pages linked to from that page.

The search engine ranking is however a balance between the frequency of updating and the number of visits. This means that older cached pages which are visited frequently may keep their original ranking. However, websites with more up-to-date content have a better chance of being found.

So then how can you guarantee a high ranking with today's sophisticated search engines? You can't. The best way of increasing your chances at getting higher rankings is to update your website frequently and increase the traffic to it through links!

#### How to improve your clinic being found via search engines:

1. **Update the content of your website pages as frequently as possible. Some ideas may include:**
  - a. Write your own short news article monthly. Even a few words that change on the home page will be recognized by search engines.
  - b. Have an active Photo Gallery. Post a new picture weekly.
  - c. Update any location on your website. Note that changing something on the home page is the most effective.
2. **Have as much relevant information on the homepage as possible.**
3. **Have all navigation (links) on the home page.**
4. **Get other sites to link to your site with descriptive linking. Descriptive linking will increase the ranking of your clinic site.**
  - a. State/Provincial veterinary associations
  - b. National veterinary associations
  - c. Yellow pages (there is usually a fee involved with the online version of Yellow Pages)
  - d. Local groups (municipal sites, chambers of commerce, local business associations)
  - e. Other related businesses
  - f. Suppliers' websites
5. **Advertise your website everywhere you can; letterhead, invoices, clinic interior and exterior signage, business cards, Yellow Page advertising, etc.**
6. **Remind all your clients that your website is a valuable resource for pet wellness information.**

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