Preventive CARE
The Role of Diagnostics

Published by the American Animal Hospital Association
with a generous educational grant from Abaxis.

ABAXIS
GLOBAL DIAGNOSTICS

Published by the American Animal Hospital Association
with a generous educational grant from Abaxis.
Contents

Why preventive care? ........................................................................................................ 2
What preventive care is and isn’t.................................................................................. 3
The role of patient-side diagnostic testing in preventive care ............................ 4
Gentle Touch Animal Hospital: One practice’s success story ......................... 6
Core diagnostic components of a preventive care program........................... 6
How to launch a preventive care program.............................................................. 8
How to start the preventive care conversation with clients ............................ 18

© 2016 American Animal Hospital Association (aaha.org). All rights reserved.
Preventive medicine is emerging as a cornerstone of veterinary general practice. With the loss of income from vaccinations and in-practice pharmacies, low-cost spay-neuter clinics, low-cost vaccine clinics, and referral and emergency centers, veterinarians are charged with developing programs that can help increase the pet's quality and length of life specific to each veterinary practice.

As a profession, we agree on the need for a health care regimen that enhances the human-animal bond, lengthens the patient's life span, and improves each pet's quality of life. To that end, AAHA has created guidelines for life-stage care, vaccinations, nutrition, dental care, senior care and more, available at http://tinyurl.com/hovc69z.

This booklet outlines how to establish or expand a preventive care program in your practice. While building a preventive health care program takes some time and commitment from all members of the veterinary practice team, it has great benefit for the patients and the practice. Developing the program should be viewed as a team-building exercise, and the resulting program should reflect what your medical team would recommend for their own pets.

A preventive care program mandates a consistent focused effort from the medical leadership to:

- **Develop** a specific program for the practice based on the needs of the medical team, the demographic, and the practice's culture.
- **Train** the medical team to understand the need for preventive, presurgical, and illness-monitoring diagnostics; understand that asymptomatic patients could still have serious underlying diseases; and discuss the importance of clinical diagnostics with pet owners.
- **Practice** by performing clinical diagnostics on the medical team's own pets to understand and evaluate the importance of clinical testing in identifying subclinical disease.
- **Educate** the medical team on how to discuss the importance of clinical diagnostics with clients.
- **Implement** a definitive program that makes specific recommendations to increase quality and length of a patient's life, defines the importance of the health care recommendations while protecting the liability of the practice, and develops an implementation plan to make incremental practice changes that will produce a positive economic impact.
- **Track** the practice's progress in achieving their goals throughout the program, and celebrate success when these goals are met.

AAHA, with a generous educational grant from Abaxis Global Diagnostics, has established a program that aids in the development of preventive care protocols for pets in all life stages. This booklet is meant to empower a medical team to develop a specific preventive care program utilizing a step-by-step approach. This booklet and its accompanying web conference will help the practice identify areas of preventive care, determine how to develop these elements into a program, train the medical team to effectively educate themselves and clients, and implement this care service for the benefit of the client, patient, and practice.

Andrew J. Rosenfeld, DVM, DABVP
Medical Director, Abaxis Global Diagnostics
Why preventive care?

The concept of preventive care is simple: to detect early disease. Not only does this reduce the cost of (future) treatments for the client, but it also increases the success rate of that treatment and potentially increases the length and quality of the pet’s life.

Indeed, 18% of middle-aged and older cats and 23% of senior dogs that appear healthy upon physical examination have an underlying disease. Additionally, 5% of young pets that appear healthy upon physical examination have an underlying disease, and 7% of dogs eight years of age or younger have low thyroid levels.

Granted, some underlying diseases have symptoms that can be observed in a patient’s day-to-day activities, such as a change in eating habits or mobility. But all too often, clients fail to notice subtle changes. They also often assume there’s nothing to be done about it; it’s just old age. As a result, a client’s failure to inform the veterinarian of the early symptoms of a disease often results in a missed opportunity to help the pet when it could actually help the most. That’s where preventive care programs come in: They set the stage for veterinary professionals to be proactive about patient health.

Preventive care is also an opportunity to understand the “whole story” about a patient’s health. It involves obtaining a thorough medical examination and history and

---

DEBUNKING THE MYTHS AROUND PREVENTIVE CARE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Myth</th>
<th>Fact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A preventive care program is expensive and time consuming to implement.</td>
<td>Not when you consider what you’re really spending when you run a test; it also includes staff time to run the test and schedule additional appointments as well as client time for appointment scheduling and return visits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our clients won’t be interested in preventive care or be able to afford it.</td>
<td>The opposite is actually more accurate. Research indicates clients are interested. Practice teams can also offer tiered pricing based on the amount of time invested in each preventive care procedure. Illness care takes the most time, and therefore should be the highest value. Preventive care can be accomplished in a more time-effective manner, and its overall expense made more cost effective.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We can’t afford to carry balances from packaged pricing.</td>
<td>You don’t have to carry balances with cost-effective tests. Many companies, including some project management software companies, will help you with auto-debits and monthly billings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We don’t have the staff to run labs in-house.</td>
<td>A preventive care program can be inserted into a practice’s workflow easily and without extra staff time. For instance, the same sample for an annual heartworm test can be used for the preventive care testing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t see the value of having a preventive care program, so I have trouble engaging staff in seeing the value.</td>
<td>Allow all employees to run preventive tests on their pets. Detecting early disease and health concerns in the practice team’s pets demonstrates the importance of preventive care and makes team members advocates for the program.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
supplementing that qualitative information with quantitative data obtained from clinical diagnostics and/or advanced imaging. In other words, adding a scientific foundation to the patient's health representation not only completes the picture but also, in the process, may lead to the detection and treatment of any serious underlying diseases before the patient is symptomatic and ill.

There's one more piece to the preventive care pie: Clients are expecting it. In fact, pet owners would bring their pets to their veterinarians more often if they could prevent problems and expensive treatments or if the pets would live longer. They would also bring pets in more often if each visit was less expensive (something that preventive care financial plans or tiered pricing can accommodate) and/or if the clients believed the pets needed exams more frequently.4

PET OWNERS WOULD TAKE A PET MORE OFTEN IF...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I knew I could prevent problems later</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It would help my pet live longer</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Each visit was less expensive</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I really believed my pet needed exams more often</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In sum, the clinical need for preventive care is supported by scientific data, and clients are willing to pay for that preventive care. The next logical step is for practices to meet the need, and, coincidentally, ensure their revenue and profit growth in the process.

**What preventive care is and isn't**

**What it isn't: A wellness program**
Veterinary teams often refer to preventive care as wellness care, a transactional process of administering vaccines, managing parasite control, and performing spay and neuter procedures. That doesn't tell the real story (preventing disease) or the whole story (offering a complete picture of a patient's health).

Additionally, preventive care doesn't check "wellness"; it prevents disease by enabling a practice to obtain baseline health information from which to ascertain health trends over time, identify any current health issues, and anticipate any future ones.

**What it is: Preventive care**
Clients today are specific about what they want for their pets. They define preventive care as a program that addresses their pet's behavior challenges and needs as well as the pet's diet and nutrition. But that's not all.

Clients also want to know about any potential health concerns and any specific needs based on the breed and genetics of their particular pet.4 A preventive care program can address all of these issues, and it can also provide a context in which veterinary professionals can assume more trusted leadership roles.

**The role of the veterinary professional in preventive care**
In a preventive care program, the role of the veterinary professional shifts from that of medical provider to that of a trusted advisor who brings experience, medical training, and a keen ability to listen and empathize with the needs of a patient's health.

A patient's health is evaluated based on both qualitative and quantitative data. Qualitative data includes the patient's history as shared by your client, combined with what you learn when you perform a physical examination. Quantitative data—diagnostics and testing that you analyze, interpret, and share with clients—enables you to ascertain any underlying and invisible parts of that health picture. It also enables you to share with clients what they can't get elsewhere and greatly appreciate: the “whole story” of their pet's health, including a complete medical and diagnostic picture.

Most veterinary professionals already offer an informal version of preventive care. This occurs when medical teams talk with clients about the best pet foods to ensure a
balanced diet, or how often a puppy needs exercise, or what to do about unusual behavior when a cat is left alone all day. In some ways, a preventive care program formalizes what veterinarians have been doing informally for decades.

The role of patient-side diagnostic testing in preventive care

If you’ve ever been a patient in a hospital, you’ve experienced point-of-care diagnostic testing. This occurs when a hospital employee takes your blood pressure or temperature at your bedside and shares the results with you immediately. It also occurs when your doctor or nurse runs tests and shares the results immediately, again, at your bedside. We take these types of tests, and their immediate results, for granted with our own health. Now, clients want the same level of care for their pets.

According to a recent survey of 758 pet owners, 55% said they would choose a veterinarian who provided point-of-care testing over one who didn’t, and these clients would pay a premium for immediate results. Further, this survey identified a dramatic disconnect between client and veterinary perspectives. The veterinarians felt that only 27% of their clients would be more likely to choose a practice that offered blood work within 15 minutes. However, 61% of the clients indicated that immediate test results would impact their choice of practice.

Point-of-care testing is the next generation of health care for veterinary patients.

Key elements of point-of-care testing (POCT)

Called point-of-care testing (POCT), or patient-side diagnostic testing in the health care industry, this same type of in-house, patient-side clinical diagnostic testing is available for pets. Similar to the human health care industry, POCT is accurate, efficient, and immediate. It is also a key component of state-of-the-art preventive care programs, in part because it creates immediate efficiencies for all concerned.

One of those efficiencies is the reduced time involved. Clients no longer have to wait for test results or return to the practice for additional tests. Staff members no longer have to spend time scheduling additional appointments and providing related reminder calls and cards. Doctors no longer have to use valuable time trying to reach clients to discuss test results. Rather, the “whole story” of a patient’s health can be related to a client in one appointment (test results are usually available within 12 minutes), including potential immediate underlying diseases. Veterinary professionals can also discuss a “next steps” plan with the client at the time of the visit based on immediate tests results.

Patient-side diagnostic testing has a number of benefits, both during and after a patient visit. Test results enable a veterinary professional to see a patient’s baseline health picture and track any trends or changes in a patient’s health over time. Any current health issues can be identified on the spot, and future issues anticipated. Finally, you can support the qualitative data uncovered during the history or physical examination with quantitative data at the time of the visit and, in so doing, discuss the patient’s complete health picture.
POCT is a win-win-win

Win for the client. There is nothing worse than staying up all night worrying about a pet’s health and safety. POCT offers that peace of mind to clients in a matter of minutes, especially if there is an immediate concern. It allows both veterinarian and client the ability to celebrate normal blood work results, indicating a healthy patient. It also offers baseline testing over the pet’s life and serves as a more accurate reference to help detect disease early as a pet ages.

POCT also creates time efficiencies. Clients no longer have to return for additional tests and are saved the hassle of scheduling future appointments. They can also potentially reap cost savings thanks to the identification and treatment of any early stage underlying diseases. The result is often a better prognosis.

Another benefit of POCT is medication compliance. If immediate tests results show a need for a prescription medication, a client is more likely to fill the first prescription at the practice’s pharmacy rather than purchasing it from an outside pharmacy.

Finally, veterinary professionals get to build client relationships, and there is no better way than with face-to-face discussions concerning a pet’s health. Those conversations may begin with test results and go on to include ancillary discussions about the patient’s total health “prescription,” including next steps.

Win for the patient. A preventive care program enables the medical team to confirm a pet’s current health status during the appointment and enable immediate action if abnormalities are uncovered. Should a medication include potential side effects, safety is maximized. There is also the patient benefit of being able to determine the safest anesthetic protocol and medication safety. Finally, the patient can have other diagnostics completed during the same visit to help diagnose potential disease while reducing the stress.

POCT strengthens the human-animal bond by aiding in providing a longer, healthier life for the pet and increasing the quality of that life.

Win for the practice. Every generation of a product or service builds on the previous generation. This is the case with preventive care. POCT improves the quality of medicine by shifting the focus from vaccines and prescription medications to clinical diagnostic evaluations and treatment. It also boosts compliance thanks to sharing immediate and in-person test results.

POCT also fuels staff efficiencies. Afternoons spent scheduling additional appointments and tests disappear. Time no longer needs to be taken out of a busy schedule to explain test results, discuss next steps, and encourage or console as needed. Additionally, POCT can challenge and empower the veterinary team to learn and grow by practicing a higher quality of medicine.

Should a veterinarian charge for follow-up phone calls, given that his or her time is especially valuable? Most don’t, but if your day is spent performing medical exams and surgeries at a higher dollar rate, taking time out to make a 10-minute follow-up phone call that could have easily been done at the time of the appointment, is not a cost-effective use of your time.

COST OF A 10-MINUTE PHONE CALL BY A DOCTOR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Examination (medical) fee</td>
<td>$55.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 exams per hour (2 x $55)</td>
<td>$110.00/hr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surgical billing rate per hour (3.5 x medical)</td>
<td>$577.50/hr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily time allotment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 hours of surgery, 3.5 hours of medical exams</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value per hour ([$110.00 x 3.5] + [$577.50 x 2]) / 5.5 hours</td>
<td>$280.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veterinary cost (10 min. follow-up phone call)</td>
<td>$46.67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In sum
In the context of preventive care, POCT enables your practice to take your services to the next level. By offering a higher standard of medicine, the perception your clients have of you and your practice becomes elevated. You also shift from “piecemeal” transactional revenue, such as vaccinations and food, to “whole health” diagnostics and treatments that provide a more complete patient health picture and capture revenue that may have been lost otherwise.

Gentle Touch Animal Hospital: One practice’s success story
AAHA-accredited practice, Gentle Touch Animal Hospital, knows first-hand about preventive care programs. They initiated theirs after witnessing what was happening in the industry generally, and in their practice specifically.

“We, like everyone else, had experienced the backlash from the new industry norms. It goes something like this: A client diagnoses her pet’s problem via the Internet and only brings Fluffy in to see the doctor when her ‘fix’ doesn’t work,” says Stephanie Adamson, practice manager at Gentle Touch Animal Hospital. “By now, Fluffy is really sick, and the cost to help her is a lot more than if we had originally diagnosed and resolved the problem.”

Gentle Touch Animal Hospital decided to do something about what they were seeing in their practice. After analyzing the market and running the numbers, they created a preventive care program that would work for their clients, patients, and the practice. They initiated the program on Nov. 1, 2012, and, to date, they have almost 50% client participation.

“Our appointment calendar fills up quickly these days, with biannual exams, follow-ups, dentals, and major medical exams. There’s no more self-diagnosing via the Internet,” says Adamson. “More importantly, we have avoided the uncomfortable inevitability of ‘sticker shock’ at the front desk. Clients are able to make monthly payments and budget accordingly. They so appreciate that we care enough about their pets that we’re willing to make veterinary care more affordable.

“Our preventive care program not only bonds our clients to our practice and keeps them coming back for more, but, more importantly, Fluffy is now examined often enough that we can prevent or delay future illnesses,” adds Adamson.

Core diagnostic components of a preventive care program
A preventive care program generally has two types of diagnostic testing: annual preventive blood screening and presurgical testing.

Gentle Touch Animal Hospital’s preventive care program features:
- Options for each species
- Biannual exams, blood work, core vaccines, and routine dental exams
- Two payment options:
  - Annual in full, with a small discount
  - Monthly auto-withdrawal
- 50% discount on exams for any major medical or follow-up visits

Are AAHA members launching preventive care programs?
AAHA’s North American Business Association (NABA) members recently reported:

34.2%
Members have implemented preventive care programs

30–40%
Active patients are enrolled in members’ preventive care programs

10–12%
Total practice revenue comes from preventive care programs
**Annual preventive blood screening test**

An annual preventive blood screening test accomplishes several goals:

- It reduces the risk of anesthetic complications by evaluating the patient's ability to handle and metabolize anesthesia.
- It provides baseline values for healthy pets so any future abnormalities are readily identified.
- It improves treatment outcomes and client expenses by identifying subclinical illness in patients before diseases becomes symptomatic.

Clients aren't always aware that the early phases of many illnesses offer no visual or behavioral changes that are observable in a pet, even upon physical examination. That's why education about an annual preventive blood screening test is part of the practice team's preventive care conversation with clients. Additionally, clients will need to be apprised of the benefits of early detection and treatment, for both the pet (a better prognosis or an improved quality of life) and for the client (in cost savings).

Client conversations should explain what preventive care entails and why it's important, including both types of potential test results. It's also helpful for clients to know what the potential outcomes are for tests. For example, an annual preventive blood screening test is a way to evaluate a pet for subtle changes that could suggest the early stages of a serious disease, or, alternatively, normal results can indicate a stable, healthy patient. Test results can also document a health baseline for the pet and identify problems that may make anesthesia more of a risk (so that adjustments can be made to drug protocols or dosages).

The preventive care conversation is only half over after the medical team has drawn blood and completed in-house clinical diagnostic testing. Once the results have been obtained, the medical team can continue with the education of the client, related specifically to the patient's overall health picture.

During this conversation, it's helpful to provide the client with a "cheat sheet" that explains the various blood tests.

**Presurgical testing**

Presurgical testing can include complete blood count (CBC), chemistry, and coagulation testing. The primary goal of presurgical blood testing is to identify medical conditions not found in the patient's history or upon physical examination, while also indicating anesthetic risk. Abnormal test results may necessitate further work-up, and could potentially delay surgical procedures.

Surgery can be scary for clients. Presurgical blood testing helps alleviate some of those client fears. The medical team can discuss what happens if there is an abnormality (next steps will be identified) or if the test is normal (we'll continue as planned with anesthesia and surgery). Also,
practice team members should be sure to add that blood testing can uncover early stages of a health condition.

**Presurgical coagulation testing**
The purpose of presurgical coagulation testing is to detect clotting defects that can cause serious complications during and after surgery. By informing the client of this, they can be assured that excessive bleeding will be minimized during surgery. The medical team can also detect whether a patient has a congenital or acquired bleeding disorder that requires further care and diagnostic workup.

**How to launch a preventive care program**
Implementing a preventive care program doesn't have to be expensive. It does, however, have to be strategic—not only in the design of the program (to meet client, patient, and practice needs) but also in its implementation and marketing efforts, in part to obtain both staff and client buy-in.

**Step 1**
Introduce the concept of preventive care to the staff and leadership team

In a large practice, the preventive care conversation begins with the leadership team. Once consensus is reached, the leadership team can roll the preventive care program out to the staff. (In a small practice, the conversation may begin with the practice owner and manager and then involve the staff.)

The purpose of the initial conversations with the leadership team is to define what preventive care means for each of them individually and collectively for the practice. It’s also
an opportunity to have honest conversations about how the leadership team feels about offering a preventive care program. How do they define preventive care? What do they envision it including? Has anyone on the team participated in a preventive care program before, and can they offer any best practices or lessons learned? Do the individual members see the value of a preventive care program? If so, why? If not, why not, and how can you overcome their concerns?

The practice owner’s role is to facilitate the discussion and help the group reach agreement on moving forward with a preventive care program. The practice owner and the medical team should also discuss how a preventive care program could support the overall mission of the practice and benefit all concerned—clients, patients, and the practice.

Preventive care programs are as unique as the practices that manage them. That’s why conversations with the leadership team should include discussions about the specific nuances and needs of the practice, the patients, and the clients, and how those needs will shape a unique preventive care program.

Once the leadership team has reached agreement and has some ideas on what they want a preventive care program to look like—what features it would include and how it would address current needs—the next step is to formalize the discussions.

What is a SMART goal?

**S**pecific: Targets a specific area of improvement

**M**easurable: Quantifies or suggests progress

**A**ttainable: Assures that an end can be reached

**R**ealistic: Is achievable, given resources available

**T**ime sensitive: Specifies when the results will be achieved

**Step 2** Formally define your preventive care mission and related goals

**With the leadership team**

Once initial discussions are concluded, the leadership team can formalize their discussions by drafting a practice-wide preventive care mission statement and the related goals that will enable the practice to accomplish its mission.

Most practices have a mission statement that articulates why they are in business and who they serve. A preventive care mission statement is a smaller version of a practice’s larger mission statement, and it should define how the preventive care program supports the practice’s overall mission.
Along with the preventive care mission statement, the leadership team should draft related goals. In the words of Peter Drucker, business consultant, educator, and author, goals should be SMART, that is, specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and time-sensitive.

Once drafted, the practice’s preventive care mission and goals are shared with the medical team.

**With the staff**

To introduce the concept of preventive care to your staff, begin by sharing what the leadership team has created in its preventive care mission and goals and ask for feedback. The objective is not only to refine the mission and goals, but also, and perhaps more importantly, to gain staff buy-in by having them help you develop the program.

Such staff conversations are critical to the success of any preventive care program. Ask the staff what they think, how they would change the mission and goals, how they can overcome roadblocks, and how they can make the mission and goals their own. (In a small practice, the entire staff is involved right from the start.)

**Sample preventive care mission statement**

“We at Helping Hands Veterinary Care believe in cutting-edge clinical diagnostics along with patient evaluations and preventive care strategies that will extend the quality and length of a pet’s life.”

**Sample related (SMART) goals**

- All patients that present for annual exam will have an outlined preventive care program presented to the client.
- The average price per transaction for annual care will increase by 15%.
- 35% of our client base will participate in our preventive care program.
- We will see an increase in client satisfaction for preventive care cases, measured by a client satisfaction survey.
Every preventive care program is unique. It has unique tests. It serves unique populations. It offers unique price points, all dependent on the client and pet populations served as well as the region in which the practice is located. That's why market research is the foundation of a preventive care program's success. And that research occurs in three areas: patient populations, regional variations, and client needs.

**Patient populations**
Your practice database contains a wealth of information about your patient populations. Start there. Create a spreadsheet and identify the prevalent species you serve, including the top five feline and canine breeds. Identify, too, the ages of the pets you serve: Are they mostly young, adult, or senior patients?

Finally, document the types of patients that are seen. Are the patients working pets, such as farm dogs, agility competitors, or sled dogs? If so, they will be at greater risk of injury, and their lifestyle might more readily justify preventive care. Are patients house pets who are viewed as family members? If so, a pet's emotional well-being may have to be part of your preventive care program.

**Regional variations**
Every region has its own unique common infectious diseases, toxins, and parasites. This, too, must be considered as the preventive care program is created. (This information can be obtained from regional veterinary publications, professional associations, and other sources.) Additionally, are there breeders or prevalent breeds in your region you’d like to include in the preventive care program? By fashioning a program that targets them, the practice can develop a unique niche.

**Client-market needs**
Client demographics—the ages, income levels, occupations, and more—of your clients play a key role in marketing, pricing, and positioning the preventive care program. For example, clients who work and have young families may love the idea of saving time by having immediate feedback that negates having to make a second office visit in the middle of a busy soccer season.

Client psychographics—what’s important and valued by clients—shape any preventive care program. If clients are young and love all things digital, they may more quickly understand the value of additional diagnostic testing. More traditional clients, however, may need to be slowly weaned from old ways and old belief systems about preventing disease.

Based on what is learned about the patient populations, the client needs, and regional needs, the medical team is ready to create a core preventive care program that is as unique as your practice, the region in which it is located, and the clients it serves.

Differentiate yourself!
Developing specific interest in a breed or working closely with a breeding kennel can build your practice’s reputation for offering breed-specific preventive care programs (e.g., Bulldog Care: C-Sections, Dermatology, Artificial Insemination, Orthopedic Care).
Implementing State-of-the-Art Preventive Care: A Primer

**Step 4** Identify the core tests/protocols of your preventive care program

Following is a sample preventive care program. For guidance in creating your practice’s unique preventive care program, consult AAHA guidelines for life-stage care, vaccinations, nutrition, dental care, senior care, and more at http://tinyurl.com/hovc69z.

**JUVENILE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
<th>Concern</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>First 7 days</strong></td>
<td>Full exam</td>
<td>Congenital defects (e.g., cleft palate and lip)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>8 weeks</strong></td>
<td>Full exam, first vaccines, and fecal exam</td>
<td>Core vaccines, endoparasite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>12 weeks</strong></td>
<td>Full exam, first vaccines</td>
<td>Core vaccines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>16–24 weeks</strong></td>
<td>Neuter/spay Presurgical blood work (BW)</td>
<td>Surgery—for sterilization BW to identify:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• CBC</td>
<td>• Anemia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• CHEM</td>
<td>• Thrombocytopenia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Coagulation</td>
<td>• Organ issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• ± Bile acids in specific breeds</td>
<td>• Hemophilia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Final vaccines</td>
<td>• Shunt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Core vaccines</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### ADULT*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
<th>Concern</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Annual health exam</td>
<td>Monitoring for common diseases of the adult (e.g., atopy, dental disease, early arthritis, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thorough dental exam</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fecal examination</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vaccinations (±)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vaccine titers (±)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1–5 years</td>
<td>Annual dental care</td>
<td>Monitor for early disease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Presurgical BW:</td>
<td>Maintain dental health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• CBC</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• CHEM</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• ± Coag (first time)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• UA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thorough dental prophylaxis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### GERIATRIC*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
<th>Concern</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Semi-annual health exam</td>
<td>Monitoring for common diseases of the adult (e.g., atopy, dental disease, early arthritis, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thorough dental exam</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fecal examination</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vaccinations (±)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vaccine titers (±)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6+ years</td>
<td>Annual dental care</td>
<td>Monitor for early disease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Presurgical BW:</td>
<td>Maintain dental health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• CBC</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• CHEM</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• ± Coag (first time)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• UA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thorough dental prophylaxis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other recommended senior evaluations:</td>
<td>Organ function</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• ± CBC / CHEM / UA</td>
<td>Hypertension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Blood pressure</td>
<td>Endocrine disease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Thyroid screen</td>
<td>Cardiac disease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• ± Thoracic radiographs</td>
<td>Neoplasia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• ± Abdominal radiographs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*See AAHA’s preventive care guidelines at http://tinyurl.com/hovc69z.
Step 5   Identify equipment, staffing, and staff education needs

Once you have your protocols in place, you’re ready to ramp up with equipment, staffing, and staff education.

Regarding equipment, decide on the specific tests the practice will offer as part of the program, and order or update any equipment.

Once the equipment is in place, the next step is to identify each team member’s responsibilities, and what they need to be successful in their preventive care roles. The practice’s webmaster must be apprised of the proper language to include on the practice website and social media channels. Veterinary technicians who will run the tests must be identified and will need to be familiar with the test offerings. The practice manager and/or the marketing person must gather the appropriate client education and marketing materials. The entire team must be educated on the preventive care process and how to communicate it to ensure a consistent message. Additionally, staff must be trained on any specific disease concerns and diagnostic testing, including urinalysis, radiographs, prescription medications, and diets.8

Step 6   Identify the financial model and financial packages

Every practice’s client population is different in its financial needs. This is a key consideration when planning your financial model and related packages. (The previous market research should help assess the appropriate price points.)

The practice will also want to consider its priorities. Is the focus of the goals to boost compliance with a preventive care program? If so, lower fees should be encouraged. However, if the priority is to boost revenue while simultaneously offering improved patient health, pricing should be competitive, that is, in line with what the clients can afford and what other practices in the region are charging.

When evaluating how to price blood work, there are several options.

Tiered pricing

A tiered pricing approach breaks down blood work by the level of care and tests involved as well as staff/doctor time involved to administer and analyze the tests and share the findings. These tasks and related tests can be broken down into tiers based on time, effort, and financial investment.

Full-cost diagnostics carry the highest fee and are appropriate for animals that are ill. They invariably require a great deal of time and effort to evaluate the blood work, stabilize the patient, and develop treatment protocols.

Preventive care blood work involves a lesser fee, because these animals are being seen as part of a preventive care appointment. Hence, the time involved to evaluate and communicate results to the client is less than that of the previous tier.

Recheck blood testing should be the lowest fee. Because the veterinarian is familiar with the case and the patient is being evaluated for a response to treatment, rechecks require less interpretation time than other tests. Additionally, the technical team can often communicate these test results.

EXAMPLE OF PACKAGED PRICING

| CBC/CHEMISTRY/THYROID PANEL (COST $40 [US]) |
|--------------------------------------------|------------------|
| Full-cost diagnostics                      | $150             |
| Preventive care cost                       | $99              |
| Recheck blood work                         | $75              |

Packaged pricing

Another way to price your preventive care services is to package the tests by age and species type, along with the related appropriate tests. Called “packaged pricing,” this type of pricing is often popular with clients. Packaged pricing provides clients with a preventive care roadmap and enables them to plan ahead financially. When discussing pricing, the client should be reminded that the cost of preventive care tests is minimal compared to the costs of emergency or critical care for a patient diagnosed with a serious disease.
Sample annual preventive health packages

Annual Preventive Health Packages

Your pet is an important member of the family, and we want to ensure your pet stays healthy. Annual blood testing allows us to detect disease, often at an early stage, when it may be easier to treat. Ask about our packages today!

**CANINE PACKAGE**

- **Physical exam**
  - From nose to tail
- **CBC**
  - Evaluate red blood cells, white blood cells, and platelets
- **Chemistry**
  - Vital information about internal organ function (liver, kidneys, and pancreas)
- **Thyroid**
  - Low hormone levels are more common in dogs
- **Heartworm test**
- **Nail trim**
- Cost: $________ (Regular price $________ + tax)

**FELINE PACKAGE**

- **Physical exam**
  - From nose to tail
- **CBC**
  - Evaluate red blood cells, white blood cells, and platelets
- **Chemistry**
  - Vital information about internal organ function (liver, kidneys, and pancreas)
- **Thyroid**
  - High hormone levels are more common in cats
- **Heartworm test**
- **Nail trim**
- Cost: $________ (Regular price $________ + tax)
Sample annual preventive health packages  
Sample protocols by age

Annual Preventive Blood Testing
Your pet is an important member of the family, and we want to ensure your pet stays healthy. Annual blood testing allows us to detect disease, often at an early stage, when it may be easier to treat. Ask about our packages today!

JUNIOR PACKAGE
Ages 1-6 Years

CBC
Evaluate red blood cells, white blood cells, and platelets
Chemistry
Vital information about internal organ function (liver, kidneys, and pancreas)
Cost: $__________  
(Regular price $________ + tax)

SENIOR PACKAGE
Ages 7+ Years

CBC
Evaluate red blood cells, white blood cells, and platelets
Chemistry
Vital information about internal organ function (liver, kidneys, and pancreas)
Thyroid
High hormone levels are more common in cats
Cost: $__________  
(Regular price $________ + tax)
Implementing State-of-the-Art Preventive Care: A Primer

Step 7  Develop your practice’s protocol

Preventive care evaluations and clinical testing should evolve from a protocol based on a patient’s age as well as its species, environment, breed, and sex. Your practice culture, including its clients and regional variations, should also be considered. For instance, in a major city, a large practice’s preventive care program may have more thorough medical/clinical diagnostics due to the sophistication of the clientele, their higher income levels, and the value they place on their pets as family members. A small practice in a rural area may have a preventive care program that takes into consideration clientele with more limited disposable income who view their pets as working animals.

Protocol components should include clinical diagnostics, imaging, and genetic testing. Client education should also be an integral part of your protocol development. Staff should be prepared with general statements to discuss preventive testing with clients and should also roleplay with each other prior to talking with clients. Additionally, everyone should be educated on a consistent message about the benefits and recommendations reflected in the practice’s protocol.
How to start the preventive care conversation with clients

The Rule of 7 in marketing says that people need to hear about a new idea, product, or service seven times before they take action. Such communication touchpoints for a preventive care program are easily integrated into all of a practice’s communication channels and processes, as indicated below.

Preventive care communication touchpoints
Website: “Come in for an biannual blood test—results available immediately!”
Social media: “Have you brought your pet in for annual blood tests?”
Reminder card/email: “Fast for tests.”
Reminder call: “Fast for tests.”
Receptionist welcome/reminder: “Did your pet fast for preventive care tests?”
Technician discussions: Detail the value of preventive care and regular testing
Veterinarian point-of-care conversations: Advise, recommend, and review tests
Step 8  
Develop client education materials and preventive care processes

Client education is key to launching a preventive care program. That’s why a general preventive care brochure, written in simple, understandable language can help. It should include a definition of preventive care and what blood tests can reveal about a pet’s health, including underlying disease and/or a health baseline.

It is also helpful to include a list of chemistry and hematology blood tests, along with definitions, any acronyms, and primarily, what such tests can reveal about a pet’s health.

Testing recommendations based on breed, age, and history

- **Level 1:** Chemistry panel, complete blood count
- **Level 2:** Chemistry panel, complete blood count, urinalysis
- **Level 3:** Chemistry panel, complete blood count, urinalysis, thyroid testing, blood pressure, electrocardiogram

Depending on the pet population that the practice serves, the medical team may also want to provide preventive care brochures or information sheets specific to the patient population, by age and species. For instance, if the practice primarily serves felines, and many of them are older, the practice may want to create their own brochure specifically for senior felines or use AAHA’s “Your Aging Pet” or “Lab Testing for Your Pet” brochures.

Next, a plan is needed to introduce preventive care to clients. This process can start by introducing the idea on the practice’s website and via social media, phone calls, reminder cards, and emails. The preventive care message can be repeated in face-to-face interactions.

Reminder calls can include instructions to fast before any relevant tests. At the time of the appointment, the receptionist can ask if the patient has fasted and remind the client that the doctor recommends it for some preventive tests. All of these comments and questions trigger thoughts about preventive care and make it “top of mind” to clients.

The conversation about preventive care can be expanded with the veterinary technician, who can further educate the client on the value of preventive blood screen testing and its rationale, such as to obtain baseline values, detect early diseases, etc. He or she can also explain what is monitored, such as important blood cell levels and organ function.

Preventive care staff communication

**Two days prior to exam**

Receptionist:
- Calls to confirm appointment
- Reminds client to fast patient
- Discusses appointment goals and preventive care recommendations

**Day of appointment**

Receptionist:
- Checks appointment in and obtains brief medical history
- Outlines the preventive care testing to be completed today

Technical team member:
- Checks client into room and confirms history
- Further explains benefits/value of preventive care
  - Provides client information and/or pamphlet
  - Discusses human age equivalency
- Obtains preventive care clinical diagnostic samples

Veterinarian:
- Completes thorough physical exam
- Discusses preventive care diagnostics and exam findings
- Outlines medical recommendations/additional testing needed
- Answers client questions re: diet, environment, etc.

Medical team:
- Provides client with a copy of blood work, an explanation of tests, and medical recommendations
Sample: Explanation of tests

**Complete blood count (CBC):** A test that provides measurements of red blood cells, white blood cells, and platelets. The CBC is an important tool that can detect conditions such as anemia, leukemia, and other blood disorders, as well as assess stress levels, inflammation, infection, and blood clotting capabilities. The test’s components are:

- **Red blood cells:** Carry oxygen to the tissues of the body and transport carbon dioxide to be exhaled by the lungs. Anemia results when red blood cells are not present in sufficient numbers. Determination of the case of anemia is vital.
- **White blood cells:** Play a major role in your pet’s immune system function. Normal baseline levels are required to determine the important changes seen with infection or inflammation.
- **Platelets:** Crucial components of the blood clotting system. Adequate numbers must be present to prevent or stop bleeding; therefore, it is important that platelet numbers are known prior to any surgical procedure.

---

**Step 9**

Conduct staff training sessions

There are two parts to staff training when it comes to a preventive care program: technical training and communication training.

**Technical training**

The educational curriculum has to include staff training on the services and equipment unique to the preventive care program and the patient demographics. (A great resource is the diagnostic equipment manufacturer, who often has staff curriculum available.) The staff should also be educated on any regional-specific disease concerns.

**Communication training**

Key to the success of a preventive care program is a staff comfortable with communicating the benefits of the program to clients. Staff should learn how the preventive care program will be introduced to clients, what client touchpoints will reinforce the value of the preventive care program, what specific language will be used with clients, and any other unique aspects of your program or patient/client populations. Roleplaying will go a long way in helping staff get comfortable with preventive care conversations.

**Step 10**

Pilot the program with employees’ pets and refine as needed

Prior to rolling out the program with the client population, launch the program with employees’ pets. This will help to convince employees of the value of preventive care and will also give the team the opportunity to test training on new equipment and to roleplay client preventive care conversations.

All team members should practice client conversations about preventive care, via roleplays, to increase their comfort level and to help them make such conversations their own.

**Step 11**

Launch, evaluate, and refine the program

Market researchers will tell you that any time you introduce a new product or service into the marketplace, you continuously tweak that product or service by obtaining...
feedback and making refinements. The same is true with a preventive care program.

Use surveys and informal client conversations to ask for feedback. Ask clients what they like about the program and what they'd like to see changed. What would they like to see that they don't? Ask, “What else can we do?”

Also get feedback from staff. They are on the front lines of your preventive care program and know first-hand what is working and what is not working. Ask them how they would improve the program and implement valid suggestions.

When feedback is received, it’s important you act on it and make necessary changes that will improve the program.

Finally, measure the success of your preventive care program by checking such things as compliance rates and percent of clients who have enrolled. Have conversations with clients to see how they like the program and whether they’re satisfied with it. And finally, check your bottom-line barometer. How does your preventive care revenue compare to the costs and cost savings involved to implement it?

**Step 12** 
**Continuously celebrate successes**

Celebrating success is a critical component of a preventive care program, and ways to celebrate are often as unique as the individuals involved. That said, ask the team what they would like for a reward—don’t assume. Implement a simple and well-defined rewards program. Make the rewards highly visible and easily calculated by team members. Turn the rewards program into a game, especially if you have younger staff, and report sales to the team in a timely manner. Finally, update the goals frequently and modify them when appropriate.

**References**
The American Animal Hospital Association is an international organization of nearly 6,000 veterinary care teams comprising more than 48,000 veterinary professionals committed to excellence in companion animal care. Established in 1933, AAHA is recognized for its leadership in the profession, its high standards for pet health care and, most important, its accreditation of companion animal practices. For more information about AAHA, visit aaha.org.

Abaxis Global Diagnostics is a leader in blood diagnostics performing multiple tests from just two drops of whole blood, delivering point-of-care results in less than 12.5 minutes for Veterinary and Human Health Practices around the world. For more information about Abaxis, visit www.abaxis.com.