

8

Ways to Improve Dental Compliance

By Wendy S. Myers, CVJ



Dentistry represents 6.3 percent of revenue and is the top diagnosed health condition among dogs and cats.¹ Increasing pet-owner education leads to better dental compliance.² **Here are eight ways get more clients to say yes:**

1. Photograph dental problems

Use a smartphone to take photos of pets' mouths during exams. Smartphones allow you to adjust exposure and crop and mark up images. Zoom and crop to enlarge images of painful conditions such as resorptive lesions. Text, email, or print photos to help clients see dental problems. Save digital photos to patients' electronic medical records, which lets you compare the progression of dental disease over time.

2. Use clear dental models

Clear acrylic dental models illustrate that 60 percent of the tooth structure is below the gumline, which explains why you will take full mouth dental x-rays during procedures. Teeth can be removed from the model's sockets, showing the shape and depth of roots and helping clients better understand extractions. Place dental models in every exam room — having them within arms' reach will increase their use. **Midwest Veterinary Supply offers clear acrylic canine dental models** (<https://www.midwestvetsupply.com/item/350.50222.2/Clear-Acrylic-Canine-Model/>) **and feline dental models** (<https://www.midwestvetsupply.com/item/350.50204.2/Feline-Dental-Model/>).



Canine



Feline

3. Create dental slideshows or videos

Explain the steps of dental procedures with pictures. Photograph each of the items on your dental treatment plan such as preanesthetic testing, surgical monitoring, IV catheter, and dental x-rays. Create a slideshow using PowerPoint or Canva. Include your hospital's logo, photos, and captions on each slide. Play slideshows on computers or digital photo frames in exam rooms.

Covina Animal Hospital in Covina, Calif., worked with Veteos to create a customized video on **"What to Expect from a Dental Cleaning"** (<https://covinaanimalhospital.com/dental-care/>). The short video explains the exam, anesthetic safety, dental cleaning, probing, x-rays, recovery, and discharge. Because the video features Covina Animal Hospital's staff and facility, clients see exactly what their pets will experience during professional dental care.

4. Use action words that lead clients' decisions

Avoid wiggle words. Don't say, "I recommend that you get your dog's teeth cleaned." Clients may hear that they can wait because the procedure is just a recommendation and is not medically necessary. **Use the action word of "need" instead of "recommend."** Explain health benefits and answer, "Why should I treat?"

The veterinarian would say, "<Pet name> has Grade 1 dental disease. He/she needs a dental procedure now to treat the infection, reduce dental pain, and slow the progression of his/her dental disease. As the dental disease gets worse, serious health problems will happen. Bacteria in the mouth passes through the bloodstream and can permanently damage the kidneys, heart, liver, and lungs. Early treatment can help prevent painful abscesses and possible oral surgery. Because oral health impacts overall health, you will see long-term benefits. I will have my technician explain the steps of a dental treatment and our anesthetic protocols. What questions may I answer about my diagnosis?"

Invite discussion with “What questions may I answer?” instead of the closed-ended phrase of “Do you have any questions?”

5. Present treatment plans on the day of diagnosis

After the doctor explains the diagnosis and health benefits of treatment, have a technician or assistant present the treatment plan. Never say “estimate,” which makes conversations “all about the money.” A treatment plan serves four purposes: 1) Explains needed medical care, 2) Gives you legal permission to treat, 3) Shares the expected cost of care, and 4) States payment policies.

Don't email treatment plans post-visit and expect clients to call you later to book procedures. Present services and fees today so clients may accept and schedule care now.

For staff efficiency and fee consistency, build Grade 1 to 4 dental treatment templates with core services and then add extractions and specific services based on patients' diagnoses. List services in the order they will be delivered, which also will match the order of images in your slideshow or video. For example, preanesthetic testing should be listed before anesthesia. Treatment plans will have a high and low range. Explain medical services before fees to create perception of value.

After presenting the treatment plan and answering questions, ask for a commitment to treat. **Use the yes-or-yes technique:** “Dr. <Name>'s next available procedure days are <date 1> and <date 2>. Which do you prefer?”

Have technicians schedule procedures while in exam rooms. It's not just what you say, it's where you say it. Don't leave booking procedures up to client service representatives (CSRs) at the checkout desk. When clients leave exam rooms, they have mentally checked out and may dismiss CSRs' attempts to schedule follow-up care.

6. Offer financial solutions

Don't wait until the end of the appointment to mention financing. Address cost head-on because it's the elephant in the room, according to *Language That Works: Changing the Way We Talk About Veterinary Care*.³ Explain, “We can help you with payment options for veterinary care.”

Let pet owners know they don't have to come up with all the money upfront and share the monthly payment. Include links or QR codes to third-party financing on treatment plans and provide brochures. Say, “The expected amount for your pet's dental procedure is a range of \$__ to \$___. Our hospital accepts cash, checks, and credit cards. We offer financing through <third-party provider>. The treatment plan includes a link where you can learn more about payment options.”

7. Collect samples for preanesthetic testing today

Once clients accept procedures, collect samples during today's appointment. This has three advantages: **1)** Clients pay for lab tests today and are financially committed to showing up on the day of the procedure, **2)** You may choose whether to do in-house testing or send it to the reference lab, and **3)** Increases clients' perception of value because dental fees will be lower after they prepay lab work today.

8. Follow up with medical callbacks if clients don't book

An American Animal Hospital Association study found 38 percent of pet owners will return for procedures as directed by their veterinarians if the team follows up.⁴ Create Grade 1, 2, 3, and 4 “**dental procedure needed**” codes that will print the medical recommendation on today's receipt and trigger a callback in one week. Your invoice description might say, “Your pet was diagnosed with Grade 2 dental disease today. Please schedule treatment. We will follow up with a courtesy reminder call in one week.” **Calling within one week is key—don't wait 30 days because clients won't remember details of exam conversations.**

Say, “Dr. <Name> needs to schedule <pet's name> dental procedure so we may treat his/her infection and slow the progression of the dental disease. We can perform the dental procedure on <date 1> or <date 2>. Which do you prefer?” Using the veterinarian's name brings credibility and authority to the call. “**Infection**” indicates treatment is urgent and medically necessary.

When you grow dental compliance, you will improve patient & practice health.



About the Author

Best known as the “Queen of Scripts,” Wendy Myers knows the right words will lead clients to accept your medical advice, driving patient and practice health. As founder of Communication Solutions for Veterinarians, she teaches practical skills through online courses, conferences, and onsite consulting. Wendy's experience as a partner in a specialty and emergency hospital helped her understand issues that owners and managers face. Learn how Wendy can train your team at [csvetscourses.com](https://www.csvetscourses.com).

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