

Diabetes: Empathy, Education, Excellence



A Commitment To Compliance Article



A campaign sponsored through the cooperative efforts of Merial, MWI and AAHA MARKETLink.

“Respondents who received written information had higher adherence and higher rates of never-missed-a-dose, and they found it easier to administer medications than did those who did not receive written information. Of those who received written information, 65% reported that they referred back to it. However, only 59% of pet owners reported having received written information; 72% said they would like to receive written information so that they could refer back to it.”

It can be devastating for a family to learn that their dog or cat has diabetes. Fear, confusion, frustration, and a sense of being overwhelmed by the prospect of daily, lifelong at-home care are common. However, the right balance of empathy, early and ongoing client education, and excellence in follow-up reminders and support can make all the difference.

The 2009 AAHA Compliance Follow-Up Study underscores the usefulness of written materials that:

- Answer common questions and concerns or dispel myths
- Educate clients on the causes (if known) and treatments available
- Offer detailed, understandable instructions on how to provide at-home care, including insulin product injections, in some cases

In addition to these written materials, the study also found strong correlations between long-term client compliance and:

- Follow-up calls, even if it is just to say, “How are you guys doing?”
- Reminders about medication refills for chronic conditions

While the study did not address multimedia options, video demonstrations on how to fill syringes and how to give injections – like the video clips ProZinc™ posted online – can be a great help to clients who need to see the process repeatedly.

Practices with active social media programs or technological savvy might consider doing their own demo web videos, instructional or educational podcasts, or even iPhone apps to assist clients facing at-home care challenges, like those with diabetic pets at home.

Positive Messaging & Expectations

Many people believe the diagnosis of diabetes is a death sentence. When Edie Jarolim found out her dog, Frankie, developed diabetes mellitus at the age of 8, a friend offered her sympathy for having to put the small terrier mix down. That’s something Jarolim, author of “Am I Boring My Dog and 99 Other Things Every Dog Wishes You Knew” and dog blog called “Will My Dog Hate Me?,” never even considered.

Doom and gloom in the early days of Frankie’s diagnosis sent Jarolim on a quest to find a veterinary partner for the long haul. It got hard for her to reconcile scares about death and blindness on one hand and educational materials that said it usually takes about three months to get a dog regulated, using insulin. It took much longer with Frankie, and Jarolim worried. “I really thought I had an anomalously sick dog,” she says.

Tapping into her experience as a professional journalist, Jarolim discovered that the average time it takes to regulate a dog is seven months, not three. “I would be more reassuring and say that sometimes it can take a long time to get the dog adjusted,” she says. “Set expectations not to worry about it if it does take a long time.”

Differences Between Dogs and Cats

Jarolim also ran into confusion over the differences between canine and feline diabetes, when several people told her they knew of cats who had been cured through diet change alone.

We know that clients often relate their own experiences with certain illnesses to what happens with their pets, and we know that it's a common client education tactic to explain certain diseases with these comparisons. But, sometimes it causes frustration.

While indeed most feline diabetes resembles Type 2 diabetes in people, including its relationship to obesity and diet, most canine diabetes resembles Type 1 diabetes in people. First of all, Frankie wasn't overweight. And, while certain strategies help with disease control, no amount of dietary change or exercise was going to make his diabetes go away.

The lesson? Make sure you are not painting diabetes with too broad a brush. Jarolim continues to see this happen in pet owner circles and even on some popular blogs, where discussions of overweight dogs are lumped together with canine diabetes.

The Power of Routines

The adjustment to living with and caring for a dog or cat with diabetes is a big one. Often client education involves not just what to do, but what not to do. And, this may mean breaking some habits – like sharing snacks with pets, using food-delivery toys throughout the day to keep pets busy, and the like.

Regular meal times and quantities, regular exercise amounts and schedules, regular blood sugar checks and insulin injections make the difference between pets who do well with treatment and those that do not.

Providing educational materials, reminders on each visit, and tools such as checklists and at-home monitors can help your clients incorporate new routines that will help their diabetic pet.

Leader, Cheerleader, Task Master

Helping clients provide the kind of care that's possible in today's veterinary climate comes from a combination of:

- Leadership: helping clients understand the what, why, and how of the disease
- Cheerleading: delivering encouraging words and ongoing instruction
- Tasking: providing tools and education so that clients can better track and accomplish what needs to be done every day for the rest of this pet's life

It's one of the greater challenges in the veterinary profession. It's different from wellness. It's different from acute issues or emergencies. It's not just your chance to shine today, next week, or next month. Helping diabetic patients can be the perfect showcase for practice excellence – not just in high-quality care, but in top-notch client education on many fronts.

References

¹Compliance: Taking Quality Care to the Next Level (AAHA, 2009), page 7.

²Compliance: Taking Quality Care to the Next Level (AAHA, 2009), page 7.



Visit our website and check out the **PRODUCT NEWS** section for new ProZinc educational videos, including one that takes a rather entertaining approach to educating pet owners of the warning signs of diabetes!

Take the Challenge

1. Schedule staff training so that everyone fully understands the differences between human, canine, and feline diabetes.
2. Develop detailed client education materials to hand out, post on the web, etc.
3. Form dedicated teams for canine and feline diabetes client education and follow-up support so that these people and pets get the concentrated attention they need.
4. Organize regular support groups or workshops for clients with diabetic pets so that those with more experience can help buoy those facing new diagnoses.



Client Diabetes Education Resources from AAHA MARKETLink



An on-hold script or newsletter insert can help alert your clients about what to look for in diabetes. Download these information tools from www.AAHAMARKETLink.com or adapt to fit your own needs.

Diabetes Education and Nutritional Compliance Resources from AAHA



Lifelearn ClientEd Online

Build compliance and loyalty with an actively managed library of over 1,100 illustrated small-animal client-education handouts that you can customize to your practice and personalize to the pet owner.

ClientEd Online gives you the flexibility to email or print the articles, edit current articles, create your own, post the articles to your website, and integrate them with your practice management software.

The Starter Package includes access to a full twelve months of ClientEd Online for up to five users in the practice. This CD includes PDF version of all the original 1,100 client education handouts that are yours to keep.

Please note that you will have to renew your subscription with Lifelearn® after a year to maintain the ability to access the enhanced content online.

Members: \$799.95 Nonmembers: \$899.95



Nutritional Compliance (on CD-ROM)

Authored by Dr. Robin Downing, this product is an engaging, interactive training CD that helps your team understand nutritional compliance issues and how they impact pet wellness, the management of related disease processes and the fiscal/economic well being of the practice.



Veterinary team members will learn:

- How to raise the standard of nutritional care through compliance practices
- To apply state-of-the-art nutritional knowledge to improve the rates of nutritional compliance in your practice
- To deliver consistent messages from across the team about nutritional care to clients.

Members: \$88.95 each Nonmembers: \$98.95 each

Pet Health Brochures

Diabetes in Pets (also available in Spanish)

Lab Testing for Your Pet

Educate your clients about common animal health concerns with these handy brochures that have been reviewed by an ABVP board-certified veterinarian. These brochures come in packs of 50 and can help you improve compliance for as little as \$.17 each! Give clients the information they need in a convenient question-and-answer format. Each brochure describes the background of the health issue and includes information about physical signs, diagnosis, treatment and prevention.

**Members: \$9.95 each pack
Nonmembers: \$13.95 each pack**

