



# Commitment to Compliance

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

The 2009 AAHA Compliance Follow-Up Study, funded by an educational grant from Pfizer Animal Health and published as *Compliance: Taking Quality Care to the Next Level (2009)*, clearly demonstrated that compliance can be significantly improved when compliance programs are implemented in practices.

### A Review of the 2003 AAHA Compliance Study

The groundbreaking 2003 AAHA study *Compliance in Companion Animal Practices* revealed a sizeable gap between estimated and actual client acceptance and action in several critical areas of quality veterinary care:

- Heartworm testing and preventive
- Dental prophylaxis
- Therapeutic diets
- Senior screenings
- Core vaccines

According to the study's authors, "Virtually all veterinarians guess that their compliance rates are much higher than they really are. On average, when a veterinarian guesses that compliance is 75%, it is really 50%."

Researchers attributed most of this disparity to just two factors:

1. Recommendation gap between what veterinary teams consider excellent pet care and what they actively suggest clients do
2. Lack of follow-up to ensure clients understand veterinary recommendations and take action

While client acceptance also plays a role, the study ranked it as "the smallest factor." Researchers said, "There was nothing in this study that would suggest that pet owners are the primary barrier to compliance. Veterinarians and their staff have much more influence than they believe and could have a substantial impact on improving compliance." In other words, this isn't primarily the clients' responsibility, as 60% of veterinarians in the study assumed. It also isn't just about the money since only 4%-7% of pet owners declined various recommendations due to cost.

In response to these initial findings, AAHA made recommendations for improving compliance, including:

- Measure current compliance and track results.
- Set compliance goals.
- Implement new protocols for top-notch pet care.
- Involve the entire staff.

### The 2009 AAHA Compliance Follow-Up Study: What We Know Now

Recently, AAHA gathered data and outcomes from practices that took up the compliance challenge in 2003 to determine if any improvements

had been made as well as what real-world obstacles hinder compliance program success. The news is good. Compliance improves – as much as 25%, in some cases – when veterinary teams:

- Focus time and attention on consistent high-quality care recommendations and follow-up
- Sustain high-touch client communication in person, on the phone, via email and through other educational and contact options

The numbers impress. No doubt. But, the real headline is this: Patients benefit from greater preventive care and more consistent treatment when veterinary teams improve compliance.

AAHA learned that compliance programs indeed:

- Improve patient care
- Are not particularly complicated or costly to implement

Yet, researchers also found that compliance programs:

- Require commitment and support from practice leadership
- Falter without full staff buy-in and participation

Whereas 60% of veterinarians in the initial study considered compliance primarily the clients' responsibility, today 60% acknowledge it's the practice's responsibility.

Compliance isn't something a single person or an enthusiastic few can tackle successfully. And, it isn't something that practices can focus on for a while then forget. Call it a new habit. Call it renewed commitment. As the calendar hurls toward another "resolution season," consider making improved patient care and compliance your number one goal.

Have doubts? Then, ask yourself these tough questions: Is merely offering high-quality veterinary services enough? If many active patients do not receive recommended care, then are you really delivering high-quality care?

Agree, but not sure where you stand? Imagine your practice is a patient with compliance problems. Use the Diagnostic Differential on the following page to determine your course of treatment.

### Let Us Help!

Every month for the next year, Messenger will bring you concrete, seasonally appropriate ways to incorporate compliance into your daily routine. This month, we simply ask that you commit to this Compliance Challenge and tackle the strategic vision and staff buy-in elements of success.

Continued next month...



## Take the Challenge

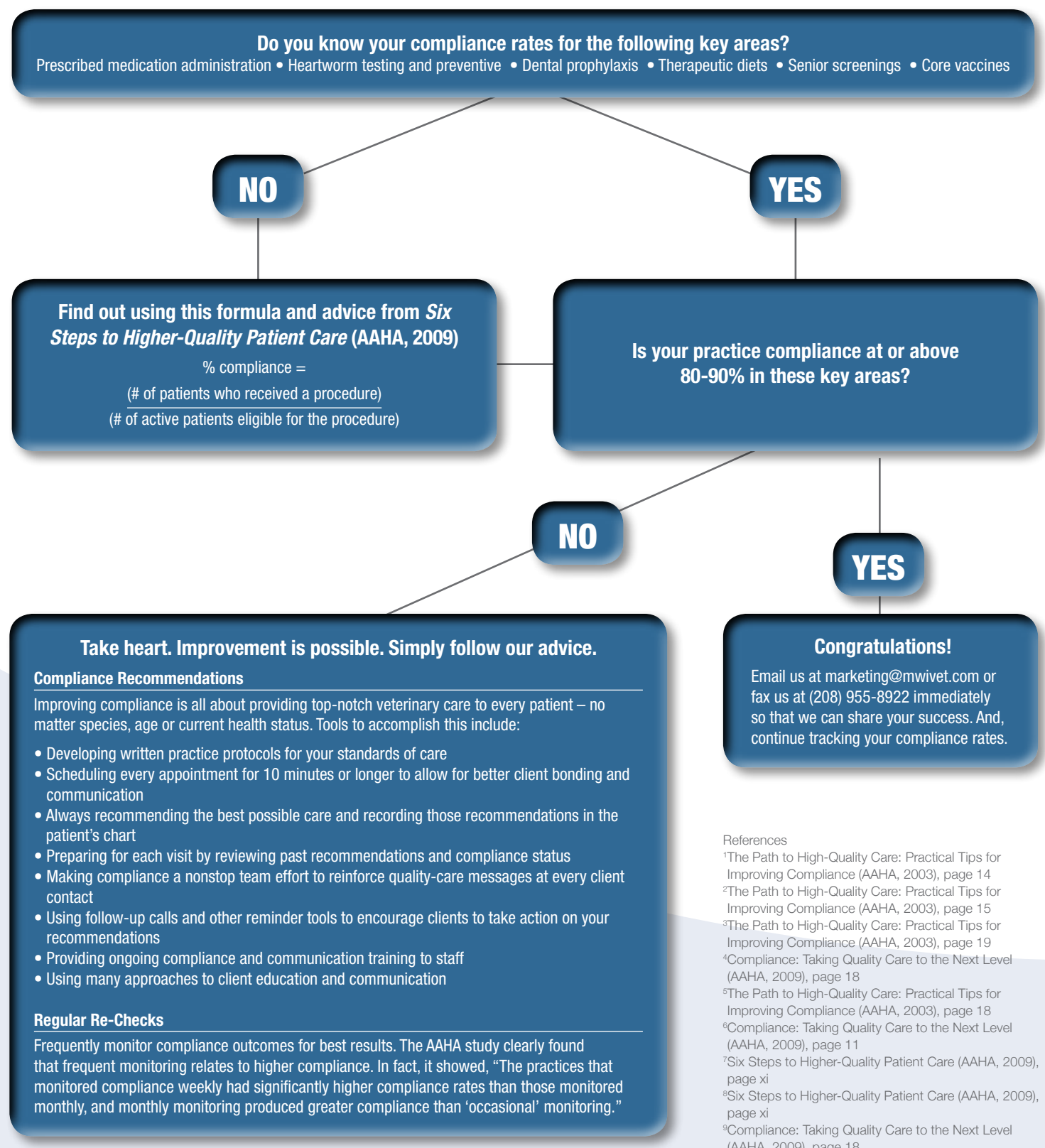
1. Calculate your baseline compliance rates so that you know where you stand. (See next page for formula)
2. Schedule a meeting for practice owners and senior staff to set your strategic direction, including practice protocols, if you don't already have them.
3. Plan an all-team meeting to gain staff buy-in and set expectations for shared responsibility.

## Research shows these 6 steps drive the best compliance programs:

1. Set the strategic vision
2. Gain staff buy-in and align the organization
3. Prepare for the client visit
4. Educate and communicate with clients
5. Follow up with clients
6. Sustain the initiative



# Compliance Diagnostic Differential



References

<sup>1</sup>The Path to High-Quality Care: Practical Tips for Improving Compliance (AAHA, 2003), page 14

<sup>2</sup>The Path to High-Quality Care: Practical Tips for Improving Compliance (AAHA, 2003), page 15

<sup>3</sup>The Path to High-Quality Care: Practical Tips for Improving Compliance (AAHA, 2003), page 19

<sup>4</sup>Compliance: Taking Quality Care to the Next Level (AAHA, 2009), page 18

<sup>5</sup>The Path to High-Quality Care: Practical Tips for Improving Compliance (AAHA, 2003), page 18

<sup>6</sup>Compliance: Taking Quality Care to the Next Level (AAHA, 2009), page 11

<sup>7</sup>Six Steps to Higher-Quality Patient Care (AAHA, 2009), page xi

<sup>8</sup>Six Steps to Higher-Quality Patient Care (AAHA, 2009), page xi

<sup>9</sup>Compliance: Taking Quality Care to the Next Level (AAHA, 2009), page 18

# Compliance Tools You Can Use

The following materials have been designed to assist you with this month's "Commitment to Compliance" Challenge. Log on to [www.aahamarketlink.com](http://www.aahamarketlink.com) and click on the Commitment to Compliance icon beneath the E-Messenger to begin the journey with us.

**Improving Compliance Takes Teamwork**

Because improving compliance requires full team support and daily effort, it's important that we're open about our concerns, worries and even objections to being more persistent and consistent in making recommendations for high-quality pet care. Please complete the following statements so that we can discuss these issues and find solutions that work for everyone.

Right now, the main thing that hinders our client compliance is:

My biggest concern about being more assertive and direct in our compliance efforts is:

When I recommend something and clients decline or ignore the request, I feel:

If we actively recommend care and regularly remind clients, I worry they will think:

For me to support compliance efforts, I need the plan to include:

Staff worksheet to unearth obstacles to compliance efforts

**"We Believe" Brainstorming Exercise**

Before we take on compliance improvement, it's important that we clearly state our beliefs behind such bold action. Think of it as the banner we carry into battle each day against the disease and decline our patients may face.

Use the space below to brainstorm your own core beliefs about why compliance is important.

Brainstorming template to establish core beliefs behind your compliance resolutions

**We Believe...**

- We believe that every patient – no matter age, current health status or home life – deserves high-quality veterinary care.
- We believe that it's our responsibility and ethical obligation to recommend the best possible care to every patient, every day.
- We believe that making recommendations and reminding clients is a shared task.
- We believe improving compliance is critical to patient care and health outcomes.

Suggested client newsletter text or bulletin board flier to keep clients in the loop



## Available from AAHA

As emphasis on compliance grew following the landmark 2003 study, AAHA sought to answer some of the remaining questions and to determine what has changed, what has worked and what hasn't. You can read the results of this 2009 follow-up research, along with the latest recommendations for improving patient care through better compliance in these two new books, sold as a set. Place your order through [www.aahanet.org](http://www.aahanet.org)'s AAHA PRESS (click on Practice Management section to locate).

*Compliance: Taking Quality Care to the Next Level* – This book details the results of the latest study.

*Six Steps to Higher-Quality Patient Care* – A companion guide that outlines effective habits and protocols necessary to boost compliance in your practice.

