The Importance of Running Routine Blood Work and Heartworm Tests

By Jane Welch

Running yearly blood work is important in helping to establish baseline normal values for the patient, identify trends in the blood work as the pet ages, monitor the effect that medications have on the body, and catch diseases or illnesses early so they can be treated before they become more severe.

Blood work is an essential diagnostic tool and is used to track the patient’s health through a variety of different blood panels and tests. A junior wellness screen, also called early detection blood work, typically consists of a CBC, chemistry, and any other tests that the veterinarian may want to add on to the blood panel. The standard CBC and chemistry will assess kidney and liver function, electrolytes, RBC and WBC counts, platelets, glucose levels, and intestinal function. This wellness profile may be run in advance if a patient is planning to come in for an anesthetic procedure. This blood panel is a good indicator as to whether or not the patient is healthy enough to undergo anesthesia.

A senior wellness screen is highly recommended for patients as they enter their golden years. The senior blood work typically consists of a CBC, chemistry, UA, and T4. Catching the disease during early onset will allow the doctor to better manage the condition and improve the patient’s quality of life before he/she becomes symptomatically ill.

Heartworm disease is a serious life-threatening condition that affects dogs and cats all over the world. It takes roughly 6 months for these larvae to mature into adult heartworms, so it is recommended that a patient be tested for heartworm when he/she is 6 months of age. Pets should get a heartworm test once a year and should be put on a monthly preventative once a month for the entire year. Yearly testing for a heartworm infection helps to assure that the monthly preventative is working. It is crucial to detect a heartworm infection during early onset so that treatment can begin as soon as possible. If a heartworm infection goes undetected, the worms can cause serious complications to the heart and lungs, not to mention the potential for arterial thrombosis.

Overall, it can be said that early detection blood work is an important part of wellness check-ups and should be incorporated into every patient’s yearly work-up. Pets age much faster than humans, so running routine blood panels will help screen for any diseases or infections that may be going on as the patient is still in early stages and asymptomatic. Blood work is key to a healthy, happy pet!
The Importance of Year Round

Have you ever heard the saying ‘an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure’? Many clients struggle to understand why they need to pay for and give this preventative medication to their dogs and cats routinely. As veterinary professionals, it is our job to educate the client on the benefits and safety of the preventative medication along with the risks associated with not administering it to their pet.

Unfortunately, prevention failure is all too common due to lack of owner compliance. The veterinary staff needs to ensure the client understands what heartworms are, how they are transmitted, and the risks associated with infection in their pets. This may be accomplished through veterinary handouts, videos, and/or direct conversation with owners. Some of client reasoning on not giving heartworm prevention year round often includes the misconception that their pet is not at risk of contracting the disease unless the conditions are right. Clients should be reminded that mosquitoes are capable of entering the household and infecting their pets. Many owners in more seasonal climates will stop administration of heartworm prevention during the cold winter months. Temperatures fluctuate so it only takes a few warm days for mosquitoes to emerge with the potential to transmit the disease. If an owner elects to only give their pet heartworm prevention seasonally, they also risk forgetting to restart it before the weather warms up. In addition to preventing heartworms some of the products may also help to prevent other parasites (including fleas, mites, and/or intestinal parasites).

A benefit pet owners may not consider is the price difference in purchasing and administering prevention as opposed to the costs associated with treatment. Generating tables, charts, or graphs with pricing information along with educational information on heartworm disease may help clients understand the value of heartworm prevention. Once clients are educated on the basics of heartworm disease, it is necessary to present options for prevention.

Year round administration of heartworm prevention is the most effective means to preventing the disease in pets. Veterinary staff play a vital role in client education to increase compliance in this matter. Taking into account client reasons for not administering heartworm prevention year round will help staff tailor the discussion to the individual owner. A higher rate of compliance in administration of heartworm prevention should directly correlate with the ultimate goal of significantly reducing cases of heartworm positive pets diagnosed in practice.

By Whitney Armstrong

Temperatures fluctuate so it only takes a few warm days for mosquitoes to emerge with the potential to transmit the disease.
Pearls of Wisdom for Pearly Whites

By Valerie Foos

Routine dental care is definitely not the most exciting topic of discussion, but it may be among the most important of neglected topics covered at wellness visits. According to statistics from AAHA in 2009, for 15% of patients diagnosed with dental disease, no recommendation for dental treatment was recorded. Adequate home care in combination with routine professional treat-

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cient; however, infrequent or short term care at home yields only short term and inadequate benefits. Dental diets are often specifically formulated to either reduce plague and tartar via chemical or enzymatic means, or mechanically by requiring deep tooth penetration of kibble. It is important to explain that pet’s teeth need dental care at least once a day, or preferably a combination of things throughout the day. Owners should be educated on the dangers of some chew toys and materials that can damage gums and teeth. Natural bones, antlers, and hard nylon toys are common culprits. The Veterinary Oral Health Council has a list on their website (www.VOHC.org) with approved products.

Tooth resorption is often hidden under the surface...even a young healthy animal with great looking teeth may have severe dental disease below the gum line.

There are several components to successfully imparting the importance of routine professional dental care and client compliance. Marlea Kobylarek, LVT, VTS (Dentistry) recommends that practices not sell themselves short with poorly understood and imprecise titles for treatments like ‘dental’ or ‘prophy’. Instead a more representative term such as COHAT, which

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Pearls of Wisdom Continued...
stands for comprehensive oral health assessment and treatment should be used.

Education and repetition of information can increase client compliance. The topic should be broached during the first exam or puppy visit and revisited every time the patient is in for wellness care. If a COHAT is recommended try replacing the phrase “recommend a dental” to using a “need statement” that is followed by a description of what the pet needs and why it is important. Follow up calls and reminders can also increase the amount of owners who actually schedule a treatment.

Anesthetized procedures and full mouth dental radiography are the gold standard for dental health and diagnostics. Pets can be stoic, and oral conditions are often underestimated due to the difficulty of conducting a thorough exam on a non-anesthetized patient (how many dogs and cats will open wide and say ‘ah’?). Furthermore, without radiographs, the extent of oral pathology is unlikely to be appreciated: even a young healthy animal with great looking teeth may have severe dental disease below the gum line. While anesthesia free processes exist and yield ‘pretty’ results, they do not contribute much towards oral health. In an awake patient it is not possible to clean sub-gingival areas, conduct appropriate probing, radiology, or scaling on the inner tooth surfaces. Additionally, these procedures are often scary and painful for pets, and conducting them without general anesthesia is considered below the standard of care.

While veterinary offices and staff may spend most of their time avoiding ending up in the mouths of their patients, it is in everyone’s best interest to spend some time on the subject.

The Cone of Shame

DISCHARGE. The words that ring throughout the treatment area, notifying us that an animal is about to go home and to make sure its medicine and take home instructions are ready to go. As I prepare all the material I greet the clients with a smile and let them know their pet is coming home with a “cone of shame” however, it’s not all giggles once I tell them the importance of keeping the cone on and for how long they must comply. Once the clients have been informed their facial expression turns from excitement to an “are you kidding me?”

As we all know, dogs and cats do not like having a big plastic cone obstructing their view, keeping them from licking areas they shouldn’t, and not letting them enjoy their meals as easily as they could before. But we also now there is a reason that cone is there. Depending on what procedure or surgery has been done on the pet, that e-collar is there to prevent any further damage. Keeping the e-collar off can because damage such as irritating the area from licking, ripping out sutures/ staples or, creating an infection by licking and/or chewing at the area. At times the cone is there to prevent furthering the damage, for example, a scratched eye; the e-collar prevents the pet from pawing at their face. Over all there are many issues that can happen if the pet is not wearing the e-collar but more importantly it can prolong the healing time. Keeping the e-collar on helps clients in aiding their pet’s health and saves them another trip to their local vet.

“What if they stop eating with the cone on? What if they keep getting out of it? Can’t I just monitor them to make sure they’re not going to lick themselves?” Yes, it’s nice to give them a break from the e-collar but you can’t always have your eye on them! Dr. Cyndi Brown wrote in her article Restraint collars. Part II: Specific issues with restraint collars, “Some animals will adjust quickly, some struggle,
Why we should **microchip** our pets!

The first step in understanding why it is important to microchip your pet is to understand what a microchip is and what it does. It is a small device that has a unique number that is specific to your dog and the brand of the microchip. A microchip scanner will tell us the unique number associated with the chip with which the brand of the microchip can be determined and then the company is contacted to get the owner’s contact information.

The microchipping process is quite simple. The pet is first checked for an existing microchip. Then the implantation device is checked to make sure that a microchip is present. The microchip is then injected under the skin between the shoulders and then the pet is scanned to make sure the microchip is in place. It is not a painful process and can be done without anesthesia, however owners usually have it done when a pet is under anesthesia for a pet’s spay or neuter.

Due to the fact that a lot of owners miss the step of registering the microchip with the company, many veterinarian offices are now going online and submitting the information for the owners. If the microchip does not get registered then the only place that will have record of the microchip is the place that implanted the microchip. Therefore, registering the microchip and keeping your information up to date (when you move, get a new phone number, etc.) with the company is also very important.

There are some common misconceptions about microchips. One misconception is that this microchip contains a GPS tracking device, which is untrue. Most veterinarian offices and shelters maintain scanning devices on premises. Scanning devices and microchips are universal and work for all the different brands. Another common misconception is about the life of the microchip. The microchip is a radio-frequency identification (RFID) implant, which is activated by the scanning device and there is no power source/battery that will run out.

The main goal of having your pet microchipped is to help reunite owner and pet. Microchipping has also become a means of permanent identification for pets that travel. People often think that they have identification tags on the animal’s collar that should be
Microchipping Continued...

enough. There are times when an animal gets away from its owner and by the time it’s found, they have lost their identification tags or even the whole collar. The microchip is a means of permanent identification, and will provide proof of ownership.

Knowing that your pet has a microchip that is registered can give you some peace of mind that if someone finds your pet and they are taken to a shelter or veterinarians office that will be able to be identified as yours and you will be contacted. There have been studies done that show that 75% of pets with microchips were returned to their owners solely because they had been microchipped. The use of microchipping in our animals is on the rise. It is offered at a reasonable fee and provides security to the owners.

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