

The
"Complexities
of Compliance"
Study Unlocks
New Insights

Cracking the Compliance Code

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Compliance In Veterinary Care

Veterinary compliance is essential to better outcomes—for pets, their people, and the practices that serve them. Yet even as more clients embrace pets as family, real barriers still prevent many from fully accepting or following through with recommended care. To close that gap, we must understand the emotional, practical, and perceptual roadblocks that stand in the way. Only then can we build stronger partnerships and ensure pets receive the consistent, high-quality care they deserve.

This guide presents findings from a large-scale study exploring how compliance with care recommendations influences:

- The cost of pet ownership
- Pet health, happiness, and well-being
- Pet owners' personal well-being

Through a two-part survey of veterinary professionals and pet owners, the results uncover:

- Reasons why pet owners decline or delay recommended care
- Common conditions and illnesses most likely to face noncompliance
- Opportunities for improving medical, emotional, and financial outcomes

Backed by research and real-world perspectives, this study equips veterinary teams with a deeper understanding of client behavior—what motivates action, what creates hesitation, and what ultimately drives follow-through. The goal: to spark practical change that strengthens care, connection, and outcomes for everyone involved.



Scan the QR code to download your "Driving Compliance at Every Visit" checklist!
<https://tinyurl.com/3wj5f5cj>

By the Numbers

A closer look at survey participants

The **Complexities of Compliance Study** examines both sides of the compliance conversation and is separated into two parts. Individually, the surveys provide important insights. Together, they highlight gaps, define common ground, and provide opportunities for stronger connections and compliance.

Part 1: An online survey of cat and dog owners



456

Pet owner participants, averaging 61 years of age, had 1.68 dogs per household and 2.35 cats.

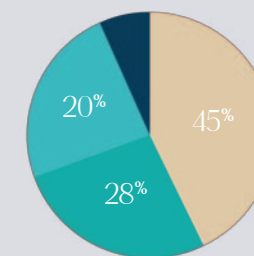
Residence

60% Suburban
22% Rural
18% Urban



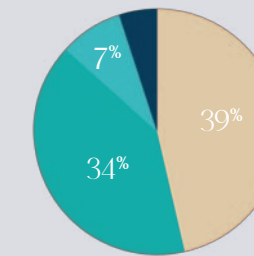
Part 2: An online survey of veterinary professionals

4,717
Professionals Surveyed



- Veterinarian/medical director
 - Clinical assistant
 - Management staff
 - Customer service representative
- {No incentives offered}

Practice
Ownership



- Private practice, one location
- Corporately owned
- Multi-location private practice
- Corporate-owned speciality clinic



98%
Treat both dogs and cats



“Compliance isn’t a new issue — it’s been a persistent challenge for decades, and we’re not improving. We need to communicate and educate. We need to be teachers. Everyone on the team is a teacher.”

- Peter Weinstein, DVM, MBA



Expert Contributor
PETER WEINSTEIN,
DVM, MBA

Peter Weinstein is an educator, veterinarian, author, and self-appointed thought disruptor. He is the president of PAW Consulting, Inc., and owner of Simple Solutions For Vets. Dedicated to organized medicine, Dr. Weinstein brings systematic solutions and insights to common industry and practice-level problems.



Expert Contributor
BOO LARSEN

Boo Larsen is the senior vice president and general manager of veterinary and pet care at CareCredit. She is committed to supporting pets, pet parents, and veterinary professionals with knowledge, resources, and a financing solution that helps pet owners move forward with recommended care.



Expert Contributor
STACEE SANTI, DVM

Stacey Santi is a veterinarian, the founder of a client engagement tech company, the author of *Stop Acting Like a Girl*, and the host of the *Everyday Wonder Women* podcast. With over 20 years of clinical experience and a passion for innovation, Dr. Santi provides practical, effective solutions for today’s veterinary teams.

The Intricacies of Compliance



Compliance seems straightforward: Veterinarians recommend care, and pet owners follow through. But compliance is influenced by a variety of seen and unseen factors affecting how, and how often, clients follow their veterinarian’s recommendations. A few of the many factors include:



Financial

Weight of risk and reward of treatment costs



Emotional

Heart vs head decisions



Uncertainty

Lack of Understanding



Logistics

Treat Both Dogs and Cats

Influenced by one or more of these factors, pet owners make small but powerful choices that bear known and unknown costs from medical to emotional.

“To me, compliance is the fulfillment of needs by the pet owner, and the veterinarian’s responsibility is to explain what those needs are and communicate to the client the importance of needs fulfillment.”

- Peter Weinstein, DVM, MBA

“The veterinary profession has continuously grappled with how to define compliance, implement it, and help pet owners understand and act on it. It seems like it should be so simple — but if it were, we’d all have cracked the compliance code by now.”

- Boo Larsen

“For veterinarians, the cost of noncompliance is about not being able to fulfill your purpose, to help animals live longer, healthier lives. When clients decline recommended care, you don’t get to fulfill that mission.”

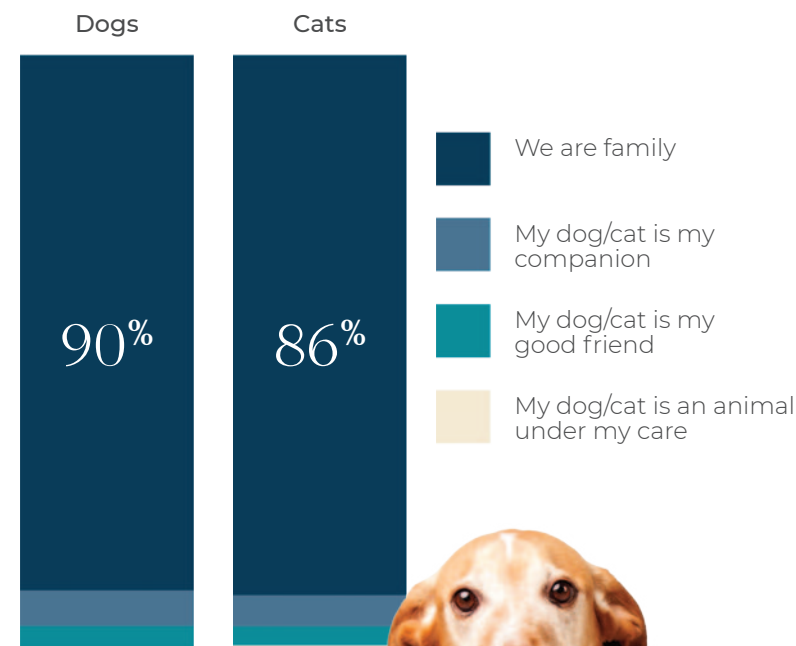
- Stacey Santi, DVM



Reality: Pet Owners Love Their Pets, but Struggle with Care Decisions

Despite the vast majority viewing pets as family, owners frequently hesitate over non-urgent veterinary care. This isn't due to a lack of affection; rather, it often stems from a complex mix of financial constraints, perceived necessity, and the emotional burden of making difficult healthcare choices for a beloved companion.

Family or Furry Friend — Defining the Human/Pet Bond



“Agreeing to my veterinarian’s recommendations is what keeps my dog in good health. Everything that’s ever been suggested has been helpful, and my dog is thriving.”
- Katye, dog owner

When Every Second Counts: Triggers for Urgent Vet Visits

Nearly 9 out of 10

- Injury or accident

About 2 out of 3

- Whimpers or Cries
- Abnormal eating,
- Does not want to stand
- Vomiting

About 4 in 10

Diarrhea

Even fewer schedule visits for other issues that can signal a medical issue.

Scheduled Care Doesn’t Trigger Compliance for 4 out of 10

While many pet owners seek care for accident/illness, only 60% would take a pet to the veterinarian right away for “My pet has a scheduled appointment.”

Pet Owners’ Playbook: How Needs are Followed Through with Actions — or Not

I always seek care when my pet is:



Injured - 78%



Sick - 64%

{ Those who said “I try” were very low at 9% and 13% respectively. }

If my pet is sick or injured, I always adhere to all:



Prescribed or recommended treatment requirements, even at home - 77%



Regular follow-up exam schedules - 74%

{ Those who said “I try” were very low 15% and 18% respectively. }

I assure my pet always has all recommended:



Vaccines on a timely basis - 72%



Preventative treatments (heartworm, flea & tick) - 64%

{ Those who said “I try” were 15% and 20% which is a bit higher but still low. }

Shown differently, 22% do not seek care when their pet is injured and 36% do not seek care when their pet is sick. And yet, pet owners understand the positive and lasting benefits of compliance for their pet. They report the following:

78% Longer pain-free life for the pet

56% Improved pet emotional wellbeing

42% Lower lifetime medical costs

70% Happier pet

53% Improved effectiveness of medical care

39% A better relationship between owner and pet

The Questions They Ask When Seeking and Keeping a Vet

While knowledge and cost lead the list, pet parents also prioritize key aspects of the veterinary experience and their relationship to the team.

Expertise

"I wanted more information, more communication. I wanted them to say, 'This is what we see, this is what we think, and these are your options.' I love my dogs and I want the best for them. I feel like this veterinarian wanted to give shots and do all the easy stuff. And even when she referred me to somebody else, she should've explained what was happening. I think she was afraid to talk to me. She didn't have the answers, so she didn't want to."

- Kaynet, pet owner

Cost

"When my husband got home from our pets' routine visit, he said, 'I can see why a lot of people don't take their pets to the vet regularly. Four hundred dollars and they basically just looked at our cat and ran blood work on the dog.' My husband doesn't even like to go to the doctor for his own annual wellness visits, so of course he's annoyed by taking seemingly healthy pets to the vet and paying \$400."

-Sarah, pet owner

Quality time with comfort

"I want to feel like I'm heard. At some places, you bring your dog in, you sit on a bench, and your dog leaves the room — or the team does all the handling, and you just sit there. At my current vet, I asked to be included, and that's definitely what makes me stay there. I'm treated as a participant in my pet's care."

- Nicole, pet owner

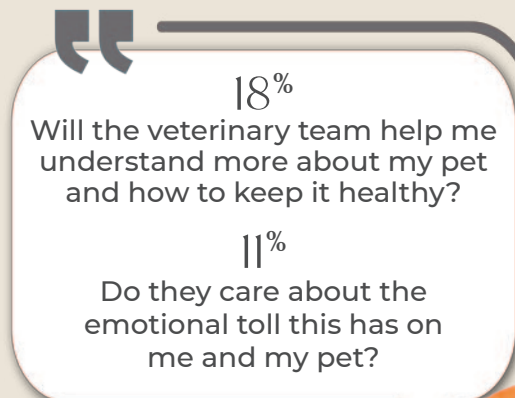
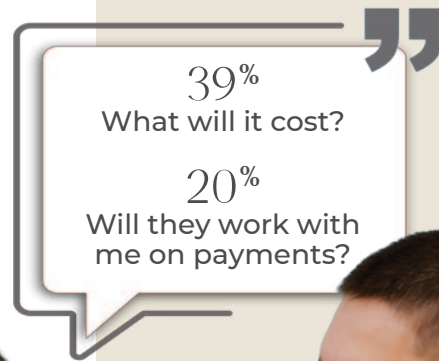
"In the past, compliance barriers have been things like ease of doing business with the practice, but in the last couple of years, it's the pricing. There is a ceiling for what people will pay, and I think we've reached that ceiling. You can only raise prices 5% every year before people start saying, 'Wait a minute, pet ownership is a luxury.' If we are going to charge those sorts of prices, we'd better roll out the red carpet with an exceptional client experience. And I see so many practices falling short of that."

- Stacey Santi, DVM

Education and emotion

"I think what's educated me the most about my pet is my trials and errors with previous veterinary experiences. And I wish I hadn't had to do that — figure it out the hard way. If veterinarians could educate us about our options and help us decide, I think I'd have more trust."

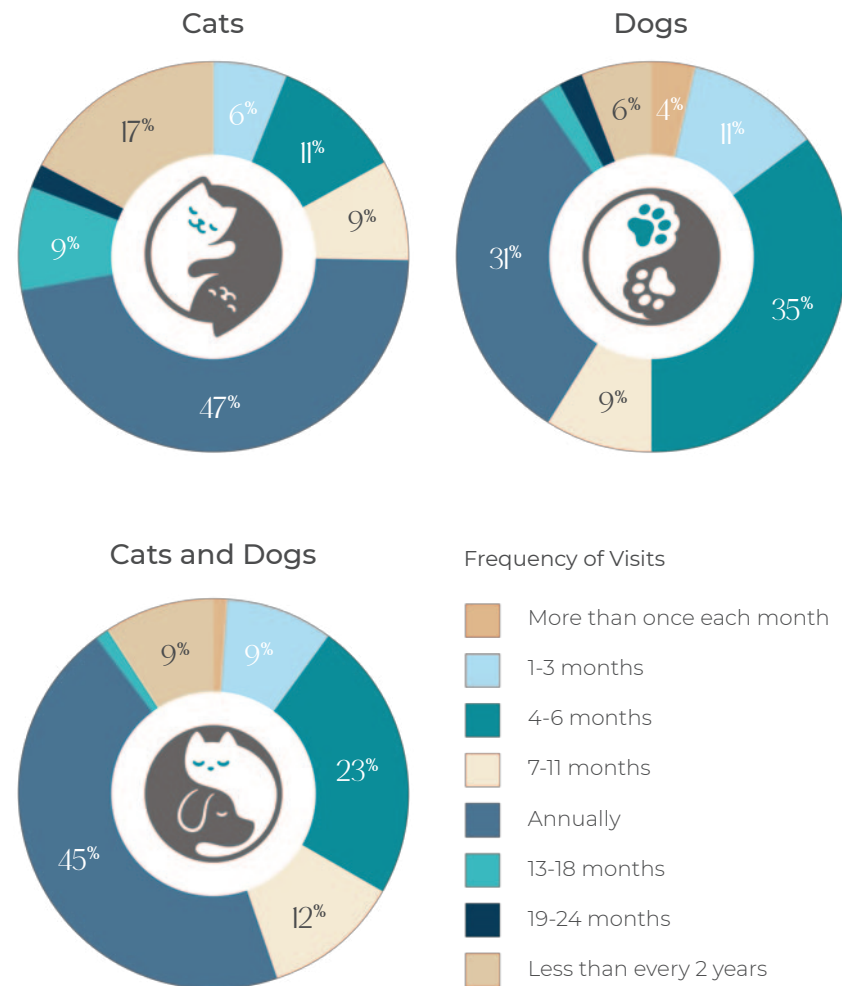
- Nicole, pet owner



Contact with the Veterinary Team: Communication and Visits

Unless their pet is injured or sick, the average pet owner reports limited contact with their veterinarian, speaking with or visiting them about their pet's health every 6 to 12 months. While this "no-news-is-good-news" approach can seem efficient, it may create prolonged gaps in the veterinary-client relationship.

How often pet owners reach out to the veterinary team when pets are not sick or injured:



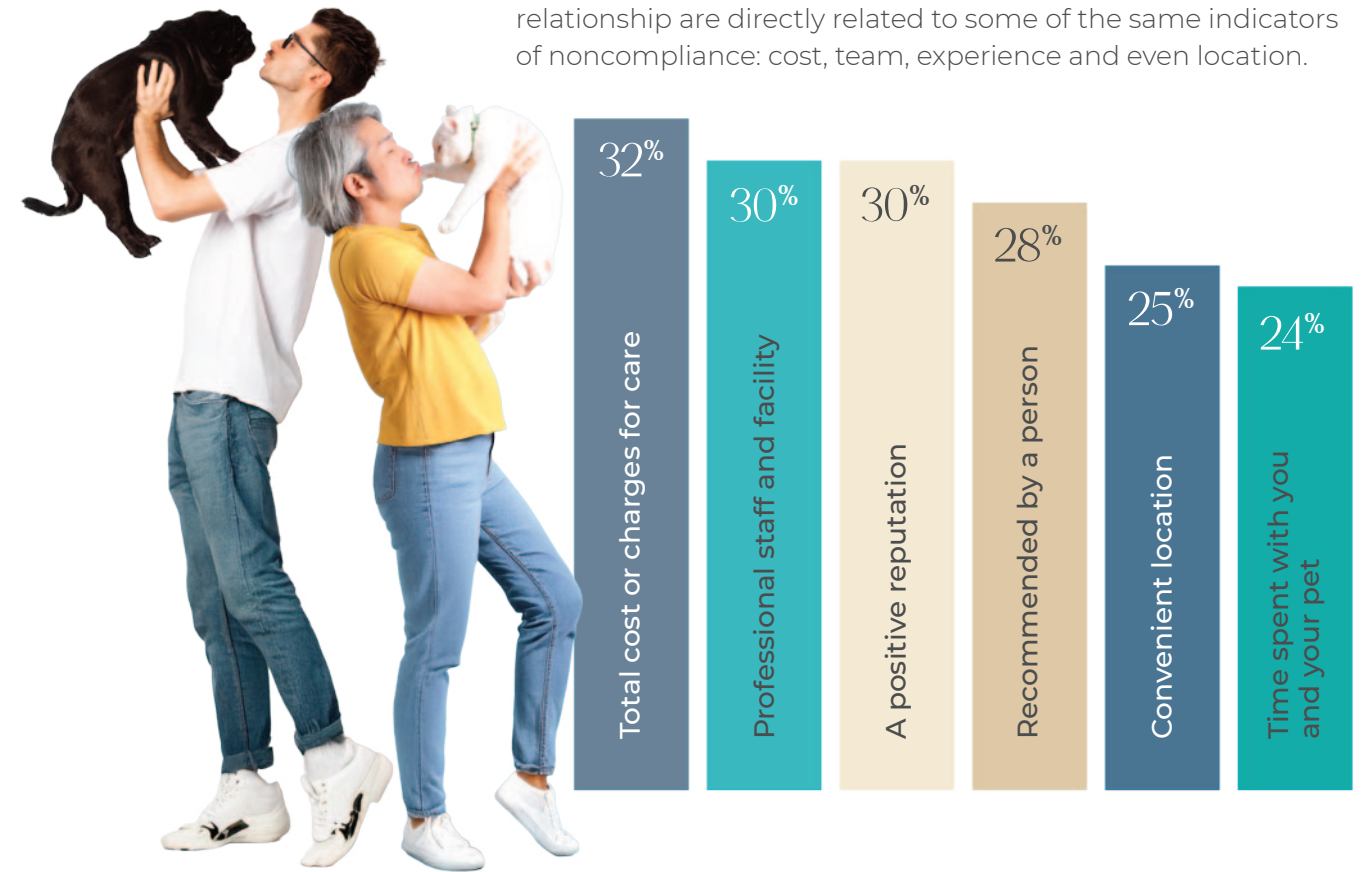
"Many compliance shortfalls come from insufficient and incomplete communication. If somebody comes in to see me once and doesn't hear from me again for a year, what kind of relationship is that? Veterinary medicine is a service industry providing healthcare, but we forget about the service. Service means staying in touch with clients between annual visits and advocating for the pet throughout the year, with education, communication, and showing that we care. Once-a-year interactions are transactional. Ongoing communication is relational."
- Peter Weinstein, DVM, MBA

"The bond between the pet owner and their veterinary team is what will lead to transformation in compliance. Building a strong, trusting relationship with clients — becoming a part of their pet's extended family — is the key."
- Boo Larsen



What do they Prioritize When Searching for a New Veterinarian?

The top six priorities for pet owners looking for a veterinary relationship are directly related to some of the same indicators of noncompliance: cost, team, experience and even location.



"Some of the vets I have gone to don't want to hear my thoughts, but I know my animals. So I always have a conversation with a new vet. It's a mutual interview. They have to understand where I'm coming from, and I need to understand their perspective."
- Ann, pet owner



Pet Owners' Willingness to Comply with At Home Care is Distressingly Low

Despite loving pets as family members, many owners report being unwilling or unable to perform at-home care tasks. Practical barriers like fear of doing it wrong, time constraints, or discomfort with medical procedures often prevent follow-through, even when care is clearly recommended by a trusted veterinarian.

What Pet Owners are Comfortable Doing at Home

About 4 in 10 will:

- Apply a topical treatment to skin or paws
- Administer oral medication (liquid or pill)
- Administer ear drops once a day
- Provide special diet
- Inspect pet's eyes, ears, mouth paws or skin for changes
- Regularly observe pet for behavior changes

About 3 in 10 will:

- Make sure the pet wears a safety cone
- Administer eye or ear drops more than once a day

And just 2 in 10 will:

- Administer injections under the skin (with training)



“This data shows that even the most basic aspects of compliance can be overlooked by the veterinary team. Something as simple as educating and empowering pet owners to actively participate in the day-to-day care tasks is an easy and valuable way to improve compliance and pet health.”

- Boo Larsen



“When my dog was diagnosed with cancer, the veterinarian explained the medications — but not how to give them. The first time I tried giving the medication with the oral syringe, my dog gagged. Then he refused to take the pills, too. I felt like an evil dog mom. I ultimately turned to a veterinarian friend for help, and she explained the nuances of administering the meds. I wish my vet had sent me a video, given me tips, or even walked through it with me and my dog. During the visit, my mind was so wrapped up in the number of meds, dosage, and timing that I wasn't thinking about 'how'.”

- Sam, dog owner



“If we've got a pool of 100 clients, 25% will be fully compliant because they're your best clients, and 25% are less invested because their relationship with their pet is almost utilitarian. The 50% in the middle is where we must focus. That's where frustration comes in for the team. As veterinary professionals, we know we can help. Many of these conditions are easily preventable.”

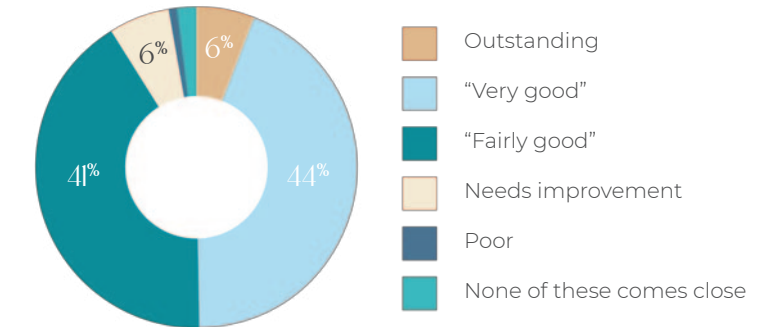
- Peter Weinstein, DVM, MBA



And Yet, Many Veterinarians Have a Positive View of Compliance

Most veterinary organizations, practices, and hospitals describe pet owner compliance as fairly good to very good. “Very good” was defined as pet owners who adhere to most regular exams and follow-up schedules, bring the pet to the clinic when it is sick or injured, and follow all treatment follow-up instructions. “Fairly good” was defined as clients who seek care for sickness and obvious injury, and follow instructions they think are important.

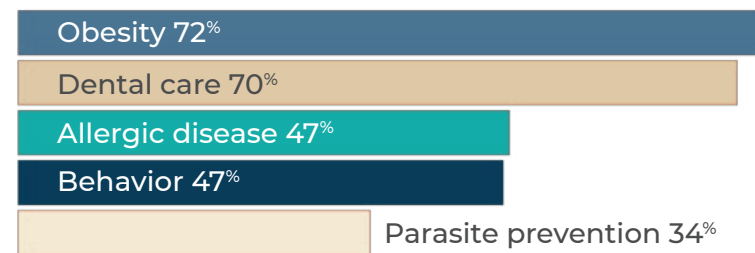
How compliant are pet owners at your practice?



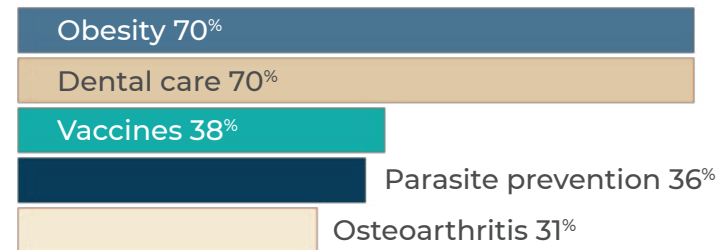
Pet Owner Noncompliance

Not surprisingly, care that requires regular prevention/intervention or chronic care appear to present the greatest challenges for dog owners. This pervasive issue often stems from the long-term commitment required for managing these conditions, including medication, dietary changes, and lifestyle adjustments, which can lead to owner fatigue and financial strain.

The Top Five Compliance Challenges in Canine Care



The Top Five Compliance Challenges in Feline Care



“Compliance starts with wellness care. If we fail to get our better clients to be completely compliant on the basics, it’s going to be more difficult for conditions like dental care and obesity — because we haven’t done a good enough job of communicating basic needs. Obesity is an emotional discussion as much as a physiological and anatomical one. I don’t think we emphasize dental care enough from puppyhood on. Compliance requires constant education. But what we tend to do is emphasize things when there’s already a problem.”

- Peter Weinstein, DVM, MBA



Decoding the Emotional Impact: When Love Isn’t Enough

When veterinarians were asked to rate the emotional toll of noncompliance on pet owners, there were marked differences between cat and dog answers. Using 1 to 3 scale information:



The greatest emotional impact for dog owners were seen as:



Diabetes 2.4



Behavior 2.5



Cancer 2.6

While for cats the greatest impact for cat owners:



Osteoarthritis 2.4



Vaccines 2.4



Obesity 2.5

For dogs, parasite prevention and vaccines scored the lowest emotional impact. While for cats, behavior management and diabetes had little emotional impact on their owners.



The Ripple Effect: The Impact of Canine Noncompliance

Veterinary teams observe that lapses in client adherence can have a significant impact on a pet's health. Understanding these outcomes equips veterinary professionals to educate clients effectively, focusing not on fear but on creating a higher quality of life.

The following results illustrate the veterinary team's perspective on how noncompliance impacts dogs, providing insights about how we can enhance client education and improve patient outcomes.

Dental care

- 92% Pets suffer more pain
- 93% Pets may develop additional complications/illness
- 67% Pet's lifespan is shortened

Obesity

- 83% Pets suffer more pain
- 96% Pets may develop additional complications/illness
- 92% Pet's lifespan is shortened

Parasite prevention

- 41% Pets suffer more pain
- 96% Pets may develop additional complications/illness
- 49% Pet's lifespan is shortened

Osteoarthritis

- 99% Pets suffer more pain
- 69% Pets may develop additional complications/illness
- 81% Pet's lifespan is shortened

Allergic diseases

- 89% Pets suffer more pain
- 89% Pets may develop additional complications/illness
- 33% Pet's lifespan is shortened

Cancer

- 85% Pets suffer more pain
- 72% Pets may develop additional complications/illness
- 92% Pet's lifespan is shortened



"Many pet owners don't grasp the ramifications of their decisions. They don't realize that their pet will have a shorter life or unnecessary pain, or that there's a better option available."

- Stacey Santi, DVM



How Vets View the Impact of Feline Noncompliance

When it comes to treating feline patients, vets agree that noncompliance significantly impacts future pain, disease risk, lifespan, and emotional health. These findings can empower veterinary teams to better communicate the importance of preventive care. The results of this study show how noncompliance impacts cats, providing valuable insight into how we can enhance client education and improve patient outcomes.

Dental care

- 94% Pets suffer more pain
- 91% Pets may develop additional complications/illness
- 67% Pet's lifespan is shortened

Vaccines

- 14% Pets suffer more pain
- 81% Pets may develop additional complications/illness
- 41% Pet's lifespan is shortened

Obesity

- 79% Pets suffer more pain
- 96% Pets may develop additional complications/illness
- 92% Pet's lifespan is shortened

Parasite prevention

- 35% Pets suffer more pain
- 93% Pets may develop additional complications/illness
- 36% Pet's lifespan is shortened

Osteoarthritis

- 99% Pets suffer more pain
- 59% Pets may develop additional complications/illness
- 70% Pet's lifespan is shortened

Cancer

- 86% Pets suffer more pain
- 78% Pets may develop additional complications/illness
- 93% Pet's lifespan is shortened

The Emotional and Financial Toll of Noncompliance

Veterinarians and medical directors estimated that the emotional and financial impact of noncompliance on pet owners is lower than that on other team members, suggesting a potential opportunity to strengthen how veterinarians communicate with clients. This perception is particularly striking when considering that conditions like diabetes, vaccines, and parasite prevention were specifically identified as having “little to no emotional impact” on owners, despite their significant implications for a pet’s long-term health and well-being.

This perceived gap likely stems from veterinary professionals underestimating the guilt, frustration, or financial strain owners might feel. Owners, in turn, may hide these burdens due to embarrassment or a desire to avoid judgment. Bridging this requires veterinarians to not only educate clients but also empathetically acknowledge the real-world challenges owners face in following recommendations, leading to more realistic care plans and better pet health outcomes.

Missed Care Leaves a Mark — and the Team Notices

{ “1” = There is little or no emotional impact; “2” = Pet owners are somewhat worse off emotionally; “3” = Pet owners are much worse off emotionally }



“It’s not surprising to me that vets are disconnected from costs. It’s way easier in some ways to have a tech present the estimate. But what’s the cost of doing that? The cost is that clients don’t think their veterinarians understand. Versus when I say to my client, ‘This is how much this is. Here’s the estimate.’ And maybe I see them get teary-eyed. Then I can say, ‘Talk to me. We’re in this together. I can work within any budget you give me.’ I think it feels different. It feels respectful and caring.”

- Stacey Santi, DVM

Future Financial Burden of Noncompliance Recognized Across all Roles

Veterinarian/medical director: \$3,221	Management staff: \$4,132
Clinical assistant: \$4,401	Other support staff/CSR: \$4,635



Minding the Gaps: Building a Bridge to Greater Compliance

Even with the challenges of noncompliance, many veterinary practices are finding effective ways to partner with pet owners and ensure their beloved companions receive the care they need. By implementing thoughtful strategies that focus on clear communication, financial transparency, and ongoing support, practices are successfully bridging the gap between veterinary recommendations and owner follow-through.

These **Top 10 Solutions**, highlighted as having the greatest impact, offer a roadmap for improving client engagement and, ultimately, pet well-being.

- 1 Making recheck appointments in advance (Pre-booking rechecks)
- 2 Collaborative healthcare decision-making (Collaborative decision-making)
- 3 Comprehensive and transparent cost-of-care estimates (Providing cost estimates)
- 4 Appointment reminders
- 5 Simplifying and clarifying treatment and follow-up care (Clear treatment and care instructions)
- 6 Pet well-being follow-up calls
- 7 CareCredit the health and pet care credit card
- 8 Providing printed or online information for pet owners (Educational materials)
- 9 Keeping staff focused on professional and emotionally supportive care (Professional + emotionally supportive care)
- 10 In-practice education and demonstrations for at-home care tasks (Training/demos of pet care tasks)



Money Talks: Addressing Cost Concerns with Clients

Transforming the conversation around the cost of veterinary care from an awkward necessity to an empowering, care-enabling dialogue is crucial for improving client compliance and pet well-being. By fostering a financial care mindset — practices can proactively address one of the most significant barriers to optimal pet health.

Present Financing Options as Care-enabling Tools



“Clients want their veterinary team to be open and transparent about the cost of care and ways to manage it. Establish a trusting relationship from the start by having early conversations about financial preparation. This helps remove one of the biggest stressors for everyone, including the veterinary team. Recognize that money is a highly emotional topic and educate from a place of empathy and curiosity. Confidently share financing solutions that empower pet owners to be ready for whatever life brings. This shifts the dynamic from cost managing to care enabling.”

- Boo Larsen

Have Transparent Cost Conversations



“We need to push ourselves to have open conversations on what people can’t afford and get comfortable working within their budgets. Even when you say you don’t flex on fees and you can’t alter your treatment style because maybe you won’t do a dental without blood work, you’d better have an option for that client. You can’t just say no and provide no alternative. If the option is referring to a low-cost clinic or similar resource, so be it — but trying to draw a hard line has to end.”

- Stacey Santi, DVM

Set Expectations for Long-term Costs



“Clients often estimate their lifetime pet care expenses at approximately one-third of the actual costs. As a profession, we’ve failed to build a value proposition to educate clients about the real and rising costs of care and provide the tools to address that. I think it’s our responsibility beforehand to have this conversation, especially as a pet gets older. It’s all about preemptive, proactive measures — we should be talking about finances the same way we talk to clients about health.”

- Peter Weinstein, DVM, MBA

Follow Through: Expert-Recommended Action Steps for Veterinary Teams

Achieving the highest levels of client compliance isn't about grand gestures or aggressive sales tactics; instead, it blossoms from small, intentional, and consistently applied efforts. At its heart, successful compliance is about cultivating a dynamic, collaborative partnership between the veterinary team and the pet owner—one that genuinely adapts to the unique and evolving needs of each pet and their human companion. This approach moves beyond simply "getting a yes" to understanding the "why" behind an owner's decisions, fostering a deeper level of trust and shared responsibility. It recognizes that pet owners are deeply committed to their pets, but often face real-world constraints and uncertainties.

To support this more empathetic and effective approach, here are some expert-recommended strategies designed to enhance client compliance at every visit, transforming challenging conversations into opportunities for partnership and improved pet well-being:

Recommendations from the Experts

Seek understanding	Focus on building strong client relationships through active listening, shared decision-making, continuous education, and ongoing support. Aim to get to the "why" instead of the "yes."
Add value with transparency and education	Performing more care in front of clients builds trust, adds value, and strengthens compliance by demonstrating compassion, skill, and professionalism.
Reinforce exam room conversations	Create a system of communication and education that consistently engages and educates clients with messaging that matters to your practice — beyond promotions for parasite preventives.
Utilize the team	Establish SOPs that support team-wide efficiency, reduce errors, and ensure everyone can confidently communicate care recommendations. Training isn't optional — it's preventive care for your practice.
Help pet owners plan ahead	Let clients know what's on deck for their pet, such as blood work, rechecks, or follow-up testing. This proactive approach sets clear expectations, allowing clients to budget effectively for both routine and unexpected veterinary expenses.
Make financial solutions part of everyday care	Proactively communicate payment options on your practice website, add links to your appointment reminders, and raise awareness on social media. Include messaging in client education materials, new patient kits, and exam room conversations.

"Driving Compliance at Every Visit"



Scan the QR code to download your "Driving Compliance At Every Visit" checklist! *

This essential tool will guide your team's pet owner conversations, ensuring thorough communication, greater transparency, and enhanced compliance with recommended care.



*<https://tinyurl.com/3wj5f5cj>



CARECREDIT A SYNCHRONY HEALTH & WELLNESS SOLUTION

A leader in veterinary financing solutions for over 30 years, CareCredit has been committed to empowering access to care by helping pet owners to be financially prepared for the care their pet needs over a lifetime. The CareCredit pet and healthcare credit card gives pet owners a dedicated way to pay for all types of veterinary services, procedures and diagnostics from routine wellness to unexpected illness or surgery. They can pay over time with budget-friendly financing options. Today, CareCredit is accepted at more than 25,000 veterinary hospital locations nationwide and used by millions of pet owners.

carecredit.com/veterinary

AMERICAN ANIMAL HOSPITAL ASSOCIATION

Since 1933, the American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA) has been the only organization to accredit veterinary hospitals according to more than 900 standards directly correlated to high-quality medicine and compassionate care. AAHA seeks to simplify the journey towards excellence for veterinary practices and lead the profession in the provision of the highest quality care for pets by improving standards of care, championing accreditation, and supporting our members in all aspects of this pursuit. Today, more than 4,900 animal hospitals in North America and Asia are AAHA accredited or preaccredited.

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