



ONE LESS THING TO REMEMBER!

■ Camala C. Bailey, CPA, CVA

I've been going to the same hairdresser for over 12 years now, and it's not because I like her purple hair and Wonder Woman tattoo! Sure, she knows where my cowlick is and just how wispy to cut my bangs, but in truth, it's because she always schedules my next appointment before I leave and always reminds me when it's time to see her again.

Thank goodness for forward booking! If you're like me, you appreciate having one less thing to remember or worry about. But this does beg the question; if your hairdresser and dentist can do it, then why can't you in your veterinary practice?

According to Michael Cavanaugh, DVM, DABVP, and CEO of AAHA, in his State of the Veterinary Profession Address in 2013, only 5% of veterinary practices forward book compared to 80% of dental practices. He calculated that if the veterinary profession were to move the needle from 5% to 10% that would mean \$350 million in additional preventive care revenue for the profession.

The sad truth is that this is old news, and sadder yet is that little has changed over the last couple years as evidenced by the VHMA Insiders' Insights published October 2014. VHMA asked practice managers: "Is your practice "forward booking" for annual/semi-annual wellness or preventive health care exams?" Of the 377 respondents, only 2.65% said yes-always, and 7.96% said, yes-most of the time. The needle has barely budged since 2013. The statistics are still dismal and especially so when compared to other professions.

It is apparent to make forward booking compelling to the veterinary profession will take a significant culture change. Understanding the benefits is a good beginning. According to Karyn Gavzer's and Karen Felsted's White Paper, "Forward Booking Appointments: How to Fill Your Appointment Schedule" there is much to gain from the process, not only for the practice and team, but for the patient and client as well. The patient will be seen regularly and timely improving the standard of care which will result in healthier pets as well as happier clients. Through more frequent contact, the practice will build client loyalty and the team will achieve greater job satisfaction. As a CPA, I, of course must mention that the financial benefits of forward booking for a typical practice are around \$40,000 of



additional gross revenue. Of this revenue 50% to 70% will drop to the bottom line of the income statement increasing the profitability of the practice significantly.

So where do you start? The best way is by making it a priority in your practice. Some are of the mindset that clients will balk, but AAHA's 2015 State of the Veterinary Profession reported that 6 out of 10 clients would welcome forward booking. Remember how much I appreciate my purple tress'd hairdresser?

Making it a priority simply means that your team books the next appointment for every patient seen at the practice every day, no matter the reason, recheck, preventive or other. Although that may sound daunting, I believe if hairdressers and dentists can do it with success, then so can veterinarians.

How do you execute forward booking in your practice? Partners for Healthy Pets (<http://www.partners-forhealthypets.org/>), the Veterinary Hospital Managers Association and Gavzer's and Felsted's White Paper share information and tools to assist in implementing the process. You can access those resources for detailed information, but to simplify it you:

1. Engage the team to develop a best practice process including:



- a. Schedule for appointments (i.e. six months or annual)
 - b. Reminder system (when and how)
 - c. Responsibilities of every team member (they should all participate)
2. Educate team members on what to say and how to say it, use role playing to learn how to respond appropriately to client resistance and questions
 3. Set goals, a start date and then just do it, be receptive to change and improvements as you work through the process

As a practice owner, you may not have the time to champion the cause yourself, so task a capable team member with the effort. Hold them accountable, but don't expect them to transform the practice overnight, this is truly a change in culture, which may be welcomed, or could be challenged!

Support your team by giving them the tools, the resources and the time necessary to make it happen. Set goals and reward them for their successes along the way, it will keep them motivated and focused on the task.

According to Partners for Healthy Pets, "When we forward book for every pet and subsequently see those pets and their owners at the appropriate times, our patients receive the quality of healthcare they need and deserve!" Isn't that what it's all about!

Pets will be healthier, team members will be happier, practice finances will be better and our clients will appreciate that they have "one less thing to remember!" **P**

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References

AAHA State of the Industry 2013 White Paper

Veterinary Hospital Managers Association, *Insiders Insights* October 2014

Partners for Healthy Pets, *Forward Booking Appointments: How to Fill Your Appointment Schedule* by Karen Gavzer, MBA, CVPM and Karen E. Felsted, CPA, MS, DVM, CVPM, CVA

American Animal Hospital Association, 2015 State of the Veterinary Profession

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