

Defining Wellness in Your Practice

Article by Roxanne Hawn

Set lifelong pet wellness as the cornerstone of your practice.

Pet wellness appears simple enough. Yet, I doubt that it means the same thing to every pet family or to every veterinary practice. As we think about how best to market veterinary wellness services, let's first ask ourselves and veterinary clients what wellness means. If good client service comes from meeting or exceeding expectations, then knowing what you believe, as well as what clients believe, remains the best place to start.

Take ideas about a pet's life expectancy, for example. I tend to think that 14 or 15 years old equals a ripe old age for my dogs, who have always been medium - to large-sized, with a variety of injuries and illnesses throughout their lives. Longer would be great, but I'm pretty pleased if I get my dogs that far. I know people, however, who find 16 or 18 not only possible, but normal, even for big dogs. Living in a somewhat rural area, I also know people who believe wellness means a pet does okay until something happens that costs more than they feel they can pay, then that's the end. In some families, the amount is \$100. In others, it's \$500. For some, it might be \$2,500 or more. Some people can take on the expense and responsibilities of a pet with a serious injury or chronic illness. Others cannot.

To communicate with a variety of clients about wellness, each veterinary team must decide what wellness truly means. Those discussions and decisions might even include baseline, intermediate, and advanced levels of wellness services so that clients with different ideas about pet care feel comfortable with your recommendations.

Brainstorming Your Definition of Wellness

To develop a practice-wide definition of wellness, consider using this "card sorting" technique for brainstorming. It's pretty simple:

1. Have members of your team write all of the services you offer on index cards – one service or topic per card.
2. Spread the cards out on a big table.
3. Then, ask your team members to begin placing the cards that go together into columns or rows (using categories that make sense to them).
4. Encourage people to discuss any disagreements on placement. (Sometimes the solution is to split one service into more than one group to satisfy all parties.)
5. Take a photo of the table to document the outcome.



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- Next, give your team colored dot stickers and ask them to mark cards that represent wellness care at your practice. (Use several colors, if you decide to look at baseline, intermediate, and advanced levels of wellness.)
- Again, you can debate and discuss the selections before moving those cards into a specific wellness group.
- Take another photo.

I've often used this card sorting technique to help web clients think about structure for their websites, but it can help work through your service offerings; where there may be many elements or parts. It's surprisingly fun to move the cards around, so don't be surprised if the process becomes a little raucous.

You can use the results to define wellness to your clients and to bundle or promote those services going forward. Call them pillars of wellness care. Call them the foundation for lifelong wellness. Call them what you like, but clearly outline what wellness means inside your practice and how clients can use those services to give their pets long, happy lives, and then communicate those services in print, email and social media.

Wellness Email Example

Headline: What pet wellness means

Email Body:

Our veterinary team recently gathered together to discuss the newest ideas on pet wellness. Our goal? To define true wellness for the pets in our care.

Here are the results.

*<insert name of veterinary practice>
supports pet wellness through these services:*

<insert bulleted list of wellness services you offer>

The next time we chat, we'd be happy to hear your ideas on the pet wellness support you want throughout your pet's life.



Call to Action:

Time for a wellness exam? If so, let's get one scheduled so that we can monitor your pet's health and talk about maintaining it. Call us now to schedule an appointment.

Thank you for being such a great partner in pet health.

<practice signature block, including street address, phone number, email address, and other social media addresses or links >

Wellness Social Media Post Examples

Note: This example works best if your veterinarians spend longer than average on wellness exams. According to Financial & Productivity Pulsepoints: Vital Statistics for Your Veterinary Practice, the median length of a canine wellness exam is 20 minutes. The average is closer to 23 minutes. So, if you spend 25 or even 30 minutes per wellness exam, that's a point of differentiation you can use to demonstrate your commitment to pet wellness.

<Sample Tweet>

Your pet's wellness remains our priority. That's why our wellness exams last 25 minutes. That's 5 minutes longer than most.

<Sample Facebook Post>

Pet wellness services are the cornerstone of everything we do. While many veterinary wellness exams last 20 minutes, our veterinary team prefers to spend at least 25 minutes on each pet's wellness exam. This is just one way we put our time where our hearts are.

Answering, "So What?"

When talking to clients about pet wellness, remember to focus on why wellness matters:

- Pets can live longer lives.
- Pets can potentially avoid painful conditions.
- Pets often experience better outcomes from problems found early.

Modern day veterinary wellness services represent so much more than mere vaccines. With new vaccine guidelines in place, it's best not to pin annual or biannual wellness exam reminders to vaccinations. Instead, focus on the ways good health can make pets' lives, which are already too short, better and more fulfilling for them and their families.

For example, managing a pet's weight can prevent or put off arthritis issues. That certainly means less pain for the pet, but it also means more walks, more playtime, more fun for the pet and the people.

Yes, wellness is about longevity, but it's also about quality of life. If we're going to bring these animals into our world, we owe it to them to give them the best lives possible. Show your clients how you make that possibility a reality.

Roxanne Hawn is a professional writer and award-winning blogger based in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado. A former writer/editor for the American Animal Hospital Association and the American Humane Association, she has written about veterinary medicine and pet topics for nearly 20 years. Her work has also appeared in The New York Times, Reader's Digest, Natural Home, Bankrate.com, WebMD, The Bark, Modern Dog, and many high-profile outlets.