

Why Dentistry?

Pet Dental Health Month 2013: Just the Beginning For Your Clients and Practice

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Pet Dental Health Month 2013 can be so much more than a month that brings your clients and patients in for special offers on dental cleanings. This year, you can utilize the awareness that Pet Dental Health Month generates to shine a spotlight on the oral exam in every visit your client makes to your clinic.

On its web page (www.avdc.org/periodontaldisease), the American Veterinary Dental College (AVDC) has this to say about the diagnosis and treatment of periodontal disease:

Unfortunately, other than bad breath, ***there are few signs of the disease process evident to the owner***, and professional dental cleaning and periodontal therapy often comes too late to prevent extensive disease or to save teeth. As a result, periodontal disease is usually under-treated, and may cause multiple problems in the oral cavity and may be associated with damage to internal organs in some patients as they age.... Studies in dogs have shown that periodontal disease is associated with microscopic changes in the heart, liver, and kidneys.

For all of us who want to practice the best possible medicine for our patients all twelve months of the year, it is important to realize that many of our clients are simply unaware that the early signs of periodontal disease are not visually evident, and that early awareness and care recommendations can forestall the damage that comes “too late to prevent extensive disease or save teeth.” The communication about early awareness is up to us, right in the exam room – at every opportunity we can take during client visits.

This requires a shift in the traditional recommendations that have been made by veterinarians to perform dental work when there are signs of disease. In all other areas of veterinary medicine we concentrate on preventative care and educating clients on dental intervention PRIOR to signs of dental disease is essential. This simply involves making a correlation in your client’s minds with their own oral health. We would never brush occasionally or not at all, and have our teeth cleaned every few years without expecting serious problems with periodontal disease. At our hospital we practice preventative dental health care, which involves making a recommendation for routine dental cleanings **before** there are signs of disease.

According to the American Animal Hospital Association, dental check-ups should begin when your patient is five months old. If we want to detect periodontal disease before the damage is irreversible, we must begin early. It's up to us to provide regular care in our clinics and provide treatment plans for our patients at home.

Pet Dental Health Month gives all of us a far wider opportunity than offering dental specials. In a month where dental care can take the spotlight, we have a chance to tell our clients about a hard-to-detect infection that can cause not only pain when eating, bone and tooth loss, but heart, liver and kidney disease in the long run. If such an infection were not hidden inside the mouth, but plainly evident on the bodies of our patients, wouldn't our clients demand that we treat that infection immediately? Would we be waiting for a monthly special if our own dogs had such a visible infection? Of course not. As pet owners, we would demand information, and immediate treatment. And that's what Pet Dental Health Month has to offer all of us: the chance to bring an often hidden disease into the spotlight, and impart a sense of urgency to our clients to treat an infection with long-term, serious health care implications all year long, and throughout the lives of their pets.

There is a lot of good information online for you and your clients about periodontal disease. We have handouts about many common dental problems on our website – please feel free to print them out and give them to your clients (<http://www.carolinasanimalhospital.com/main/client-education>). Get the conversation started – and don't be shy about adding urgency to the message.

Make Pet Dental Health Month 2013 more than a rush to offer dental services in just four short weeks. Make it the door to better and more dental services all year long.