



SKIN AND COAT THERAPY COMPLIANCE

TACTICS TARGETED TO HOME DERMATOLOGICAL CARE CAN BOOST SUCCESS RATES

BY DEBORAH CAMERON, PATTERSON VETERINARY

Owner compliance is one of the most important factors to consider when care is focused on home-based dermatological therapy. Unfortunately, it can be a challenge in the presence of anxious or uncooperative animals, heavily scheduled pet owners or communication challenges.

At the height of summer, impacts from environmental allergies and other skin conditions are at their peak and owners see firsthand the discomfort they cause. If this isn't enough motivation to use therapies properly, providers would do well to consider a range of compliance tactics specific to home dermatological care. All of them are part of a team effort between

veterinarians, clients and patients that can boost success rates and impact animal health.

THINK IN THREES: START EARLY, FOLLOW THROUGH AND FOLLOW UP

One foundational method leading to better results is to approach treatment as a three-stage line of attack. This starts with encouraging patients to connect with their provider as soon as they suspect there's an issue because, as with most disease processes, conditions that are addressed earlier can be treated more easily.

Board-certified veterinary dermatologist Dr. Michael Rossi has seen this

firsthand. "Pet owners are likely to notice a problem initially," he said. "Sometimes they hesitate because they think a condition will disappear on its own, they don't want to be seen to overreact or they think they might be able to treat it with a home remedy. However, waiting may increase the risk that the condition will worsen."

Additionally, clients need to be encouraged to stick with the program for the entire treatment period as communicated by their vet. Once the skin starts looking better, many pet owners assume that they have a green light to discontinue topical therapies or prescriptions. Doing this can be a cause of suboptimal results. "We know that many conditions will come out of remission if the underlying cause isn't addressed adequately, whether short-term or over the course of the patient's life," Rossi said.

Rossi has also seen how ongoing follow-up can make a difference in the long-term resolution of many problems. After treatment, he encourages his clients to begin a schedule of maintenance for their pets. "The correct medicated shampoos, mousse and wipes can be used as ongoing maintenance, so that it is less likely that we have to revert back to what we call reactive treatments, where we're inducing remission again."

LOCATION COUNTS: USE OUTDOOR BATHS AND WALK-IN SHOWERS

Many topical therapies need to be applied with maximum skin contact and remain on the coat for a distinct amount of time to retain optimal effectiveness. For example, Pharmaseb shampoo from Animal Pharmaceuticals is a gentle, broad-spectrum antibacterial and antifungal shampoo. It's made with chlorhexidine and ketoconazole, and the optimum time to leave on the coat is 10 minutes.

Bathing dogs outside goes a long way when using these kinds of solutions, Rossi advises. "You can lather them up and, in the right environment, let them run around the yard and play ball for 10 minutes while the shampoo stays in contact with the skin and coat."

When the weather is uncooperative or a yard isn't available, a walk-in shower is an equally good location. Dr. Rossi says he uses that approach with his own dogs and enjoys spending time with them while the shampoo is doing its work.

USING WIPES? CHOOSE LARGER SIZES WHEN POSSIBLE

Wipes can serve as an effective tool to support skin and coat health in between baths and mousse treatments, particularly with a wipe that mirrors other therapy components like shampoo, mousse and conditioners. Animal Pharmaceuticals' Aloe and Oatmeal wipes are specially formulated to soothe skin and help increase the dermal barrier and to enhance the use of the shampoo and crème rinse that are in the same line.

As with shampoos, it's more effective to maintain the most contact possible, and Rossi has found that larger wipe pad sizes make this easier. "The big wipes are about the size of a baby wipe and they're easier to use in my opinion. They can get into more of the cracks and crevices, between digits, or in between other cracks, folds or crevices around a pet's face," he said.

If smaller sized wipes are all that's available, using something is better than nothing. But a larger pad size can go a long way to making a difference.

LIMIT MOUTH CONTACT DURING THE APPLICATION

It's helpful for clients to keep their pets distracted during the application period, and particularly to keep their

mouth occupied, which lessens the temptation for them to lick at applied areas. Rossi said that he's seen that a lick mat or providing treat-based foods are great options in these cases. They can help pets pass the time, calming what could otherwise be a stressful experience, and providing positive associations to the dog about the process.

Medicated conditioning products that support shampoos, such as Animal Pharmaceuticals' Pramox crème rinse or Pharmaseb mousse, provide deeper skin nourishment; the longer it stays on the pet, the better. "Just as with bathing, if you apply a conditioner or a mousse, throw the ball outside while it's contacting the skin and coat. Then you're also spending quality time with them, and you're going to increase the human-animal bond when you're connecting with them during treatment."

ENHANCING PILL-BASED MEDICATION COMPLIANCE

There are specific times when a pet's condition requires the use of antimicrobials. A broad-range antibacterial agent such as Pivetal's Delaquin (marbofloxacin), which is effective against gram-positive and gram-negative bacteria, can be helpful in these cases.

One foundational step towards compliance with oral medications is ensuring a client understands the importance of administering all medications as prescribed, which includes administering all doses dispensed. A common cause of treatment failure is when the pet owner stops a medication as soon as they see improvement in their pet's condition.

Additionally, if medications are tablet-based, choosing a flavored option, such as beef-flavored Delaquin, allows

pets to form a positive connection with a medication experience. They mask the flavor of the medication but aren't necessarily given in the place of a treat. They're often delivered as a top dress on food so that owners can visually confirm that their pet is eating it while they're having their meal.

Antimicrobials in a pill format including flavored tablets (rather than chewable) can also be delivered in a pill pocket to achieve the same goal, holding a pill securely so it's easier to confirm the dose is administered. Either approach has advantages over hiding a pill in a piece of cheese or other food where the pet has a greater opportunity to separate the medication from the food carrier, dropping or depositing the medication out of the pet owner's view, causing the pet owner to falsely believe the dosing was achieved.

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE PARTNERSHIP

Sometimes, the biggest cause for noncompliance is the simplest: a client didn't really understand expectations, or they were afraid to ask when they had a question, so they used their best judgment. "As it is with any relationship, communication between veterinarians and pet owners is very important," Rossi said. "We need to be clear and to check for understanding in a friendly, approachable way."

Rossi urges other doctors to consider if they're maintaining an environment that's open enough so that patients feel comfortable reaching out to them in any situation. "It's about more than just a sentiment that says, 'Ask me anything, there are no minor questions,'" he said. "In the end, it's all about the partnership between a client and their veterinarian. We're a team, with our shared goal to enhance patient health, both at home and in the clinic." ■