

Heartworm Hero: Marie Lance, DVM

Heartworm protection for every pet, every budget

“I can’t afford it,” is probably one of the more common responses you hear when recommending heartworm medication. Meet Marie G. Lance, DVM, CVCP, a heartworm hero whose goal is to provide an affordable option for every client. Since opening her solo practice three years ago, she has made it a priority to address the unique needs of each patient — and each pet owner. That means she is realistic about clients’ financial constraints and works hard to make it easier for them to do what’s best for their pets. Lance Animal Hospital in Gainesville, Georgia, has a staff of 12 and offers both traditional and complementary medicines to help every patient achieve optimal health.

Always ask

“We have a heartworm discussion with every exam,” says Dr. Lance. “We’re proactive on this topic because we live in a heartworm-endemic area. Even if the visit is only for a broken toenail, we want to make sure the patient is on heartworm prevention. If we know a client hasn’t purchased lately, we’ll say, ‘Our records show you haven’t purchased any heartworm medication since 2011 and it’s now 2012, going on 2013. Does that mean you’ve gotten it elsewhere?’ Then they’ll admit, ‘No, I haven’t, because I don’t think I can afford it.’”

Offer many options

“I carry a range of heartworm medications so there’s something everyone can afford,” says Dr. Lance. “I tell people I want them to come back in a month for a heartworm test if they feel they can’t afford it this month. And when they do come for heartworm medication, if they can’t afford the product I prefer, I recommend a lower-priced product. We try to work within people’s budgets and schedule a follow-up call if we haven’t heard back from them in a month.”

Deliver a unified message

The entire staff is trained to deliver the heartworm prevention message. Every time a client brings in a pet, front desk staff and technicians ask about heartworm testing and medication. Dr. Lance comes in as the third line of defense to reinforce the message and answer questions.

Their goal is to have everyone understand the importance of heartworm prevention, know which products the doctor recommends and be able to explain the differences

between products. That way they all feel confident recommending an alternative if necessary.

Create affordable health care plans

If a patient comes in for a basic visit without a heartworm test, a follow-up is automatically scheduled for the next month. The front desk calls and says, “We talked about doing a heartworm test last month while you were here. Would you like to come in for that today?” As an added incentive for people to do what’s best for their pets, there are no extra exam fees for six months after the initial visit for anything the doctor recommends.

“We do our best to take clients’ budgetary limitations into account,” says Dr. Lance. “We create a plan for every patient and tell the pet owner, ‘Here’s your pet’s health care plan for the next six months. If you can’t afford to do this all now, we can spread it out over time. Let’s take care of the basics now, but please come back next month. When you bring your pet in for the heartworm test, we’ll give you a free sample of preventive medicine to get you started. Then the following month, come in and purchase your six-pack.’ Spreading expenses out over time usually makes it manageable for clients who are struggling to make ends meet. We try to make it all affordable while providing the best possible care.”

Get the dose right

Health care plans for puppies and kittens are especially important. Because body weights change during this rapid growth phase, heartworm preventive is dispensed one dose at a time. With each subsequent visit, young dogs and cats are weighed and dosages adjusted as needed.

“We see puppies and kittens every month until they’re spayed or neutered — and beyond if the animal is still growing and gaining weight,” says Dr. Lance. “We don’t want a pet to end up with heartworm disease because it outgrew its heartworm medicine dosage.”

Build a bond

“We work hard to develop trust by truly listening to our clients and using personal stories to illustrate important points,” says Dr. Lance. “We want clients to understand we’re in it together — that we all want to prevent heartworm disease because that’s what’s best for their pets.”

