Partnering for Pets’ Preventive Health Care
An Interview With Elisa Mazzaferro, DVM, PhD, Diplomate ACVECC

Partners for Healthy Pets, a collaboration of more than 106 industry organizations, including the American Veterinary Medical Association and the American Animal Hospital Association, is working to ensure pets receive preventive health care through regular veterinary visits. Dr. Elisa Mazzaferro is a spokesperson for the campaign as well as an emergency and critical care specialist at Cornell University Veterinary Specialists in Stamford, Connecticut. In this interview, she shares insight into her role with Partners for Healthy Pets and discusses the resources available that emphasize the value of preventive care to pet owners.

As a spokesperson for Partners for Healthy Pets, what does your role entail?
I am working with the collaboration to help educate pet owners that annual checkups are as essential as food and love. We also communicate to local media that yearly checkups provide the preventive health care pets require to lead happier, healthier lives. As part of the Partners for Healthy Pets team, I also encourage consumers to commit to annual checkups in order to help decrease outcomes that are less than favorable. Many veterinarians are seeing increases in pet obesity, diabetes, dental disease, parasitism, and ear infections—diseases that are preventable if treated early. As an emergency room veterinarian, I see many pets come into the clinic with illnesses, such as renal disease and congestive heart failure, that would have been preventable, or less severe, if identified earlier.

What are the benefits of being part of this collaboration?
The collaboration has helped me improve my techniques for communicating the importance of preventive care to clients. In addition, when friends and family members call me with questions about their pets, I encourage them to schedule an appointment with their own veterinarians, which allows the pet’s primary health care team to physically examine the pet and determine what is going on health-wise.

What resources does Partners for Healthy Pets provide to veterinary professionals to help them communicate the importance and value of preventive care to pet owners?
Partners for Healthy Pets has designed an online “toolbox” to help veterinarians converse more successfully with their clients about the benefits of regular preventive health care visits. The tools, which are available for free at partnersforhealthypets.org, include:
• Clear recommendations for providing preventive health care based on the AAHA–AVMA Preventive Healthcare Guidelines for Dogs & Cats
• Words That Work videos and scripts on how to effectively communicate with clients the benefits of preventive care
• Step-by-step instructions on implementing a monthly payment plan for preventive health care
• The Opportunity—a customized survey that provides insight into client perspectives and opinions
• Social media and internet marketing tips and guidelines to help reach out to clients and keep pet preventive care on their priority lists.

Partners for Healthy Pets has launched a consumer advertising campaign to communicate directly with pet owners—can individual practices be a part of this campaign?
Yes! In fact, we currently have over 3800 practices across the country involved through our Practice Enrollment Program. As an enrolled practice, members receive our monthly Special Care enewsletter, which helps them implement the consumer campaign and be aware of campaign activity. By referencing this tool in their everyday business, veterinarians can help us spread the key message of the campaign in a powerful way.

Do you think the ABC 20/20 program titled, “Is Your Veterinarian Being Honest with You,” will affect pet owners' decisions regarding regular veterinary visits and preventive care?
I was very surprised by this segment, as it certainly did not accurately reflect the veterinary profession I know and respect. On a positive note, some of the potential miscommunication issues highlighted in the segment can be eliminated by establishing a relationship with clients built on trust, and it reminds those of us in the profession how important it is to make the most of each minute spent with clients during regular preventive care visits.

How should veterinary professionals best address questions from clients, even the media, about the points raised in the 20/20 program?
I would advise those in the profession to emphasize that the basis of good medicine is a thorough understanding of the pet’s health accompanied by recommendations designed to produce the best plan of care for each individual pet. Ultimately, the pet owner determines what services will be provided for his or her pet. Establishing and maintaining good relationships with your clients helps them follow your recommendations and make the best decisions for their pets’ health, which, in turn, strengthens and grows your practice.