

## Forward Booking WORKS!

At the surface, forward booking looks like an impossible task. It's perceived as asking our clients to predict the future, and commit to an appointment they may not even make for themselves that far in advance. In reality, forward booking is not only a convenience to our clients, but ensures the highest quality of care for their pet. I was a skeptic at first; I got plenty of strange looks and the infamous "let me call you" from any client I asked about booking their appointment next year. Then something happened: I started to believe in it.

I started to wonder what I, as a fellow pet owner, would need to hear in order to agree to book an appointment so far in advance. This caused me to change my approach from "selling" a slot in our schedule, to portraying future booking as a service to both our clients and the pets they love. By adopting a flexible, causal approach, our clients know we're here to work for them: we offer a small exam discount for pre-booking, with no-hassle rescheduling. We can say "same time, same day next year?" and our clients know they can still get the benefits of that appointment even if their schedule changes down the road. This allows us to focus on the main message: we want your pet to get the best continued care with us, and we want to make that care accessible and flexible for you.

This messages rings loud and clear to our clients day in and day out. With the buy-in of every member of our staff, future booking is considered best medicine at our clinic. Preventive and medical progress exams are discussed at each level of care: the technician who rooms and discharges them, the doctor who examines them, and the receptionist who checks them out. With multiple touchpoints, our clients realize the importance we put on follow-up appointments – both annually and ongoing medical issues. Our clinic has been able to maintain an over 40% forward booking compliance going on two years in a row, which has allowed us to make booking a patient's next appointment a standard part of their exam.

My advice to practices who are new to the idea or struggling with forward booking would be to make sure your team shares the same vision. Make it a topic at rounds or staff meetings, and ask your staff why they think forward booking appointments is important. Create a goal as a team and track your progress so your staff can see their hard work and dedication to forward booking paying off. Reward your staff for goals met and encourage a new goal. Align your team, work for your clients, commit to their pets, and they'll all give the same back to you.

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