

# The Benefits of IV Fluids

Fluid administration helps ensure patient well-being and brings peace of mind to clients and veterinarians.

**M**ore and more, veterinarians depend on high-quality IV fluid systems to provide the best treatment to their patients – a standard of care their clients have come to expect. Fluid administration is a hallmark sign of providing good care, note experts. For animals that are ill or undergoing surgery, IV fluids help maintain hydration and acid base status. They help replenish blood and fluid, keep organs perfused, maintain colloidal oncotic pressure, and provide electrolytes and nutrients to the patient. Withholding or delaying fluids can threaten the animal's well-being.

## Products and accessories

Recent improvements in IV technology mean that veterinarians today can count on intravenous catheters that are sharper and less reactive to the patient's body. Fluid pumps are designed to promote more constant and accurate infusion volumes, such that the drip rate no longer fluctuates as the patient shifts positions. Veterinarians can rely on the pumps to administer antibiotics, pain medications and other essential drugs in addition to the standard fluids.

IV fluids contain electrolytes, which must be replaced when animals become ill. Some fluids also contain buffers, which are converted to bicarbonate and help resolve acidosis associated with different diseases and shock.

The most commonly used fluids include lactated Ringers solution, followed by Normosol-R and Plasmalyte solutions. Veterinarians should also

stock their shelves with 0.9 percent sodium chloride, which is important for patients with alkalosis or diabetes. A supply of oncotic fluid, such as hetastarch, which quickly restores blood pressure and volume, thereby helping to elevate oncotic pressure, can help resolve complications caused by shock.

Sales reps should offer a number of ancillary products, including pumps, catheters, needle and needle-free sets, fluid administration sets, IV extension sets to permit greater patient movement and extension sets with a T-connector, which provides access to the catheter. In addition,

they should suggest to their customers solutions for skin preparation, bandaging materials and patient restraint devices.

## How to sell

Sales reps with a comprehensive understanding of how IV fluid systems work and why they are important are better equipped to provide their customers with the right solution. Before calling on a clinic, they should brush up on the following points:

- The types of catheters available and how they are used. (Given how busy veterinary practices are, veterinarians and their technicians require catheters that are easy to insert, maintain and monitor.)
- The types of fluid available, and when they are appropriate for use.
- Electrolyte abnormalities.
- Acid-base disorders.
- The effects of fluids on the plasma oncotic pressure.
- Ways in which water and electrolytes are redistributed in the body.

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By asking the right questions, reps can narrow down their customers' needs. Some great probing questions include:

- “Doctor, how often do you use intravenous fluids? How often do you use subcutaneous fluids?”
- “Do you use intravenous fluids during anesthesia? Do all of your anesthetized patients receive fluids?”
- “Do you allow clients to give their pets fluids at home? If so, how much training do you provide?”
- “Have you encountered



spread of disease or sepsis, which is caused when fluids have been contaminated. Sales reps should emphasize the importance of single bag usage and practicing asepsis, as well as stress the value of fluids to patient recovery.

Indeed, cost should not deter veterinarians from purchasing IV fluid systems. True, ancillaries must be replaced with each new patient, but fluid pumps are long lasting. It was once believed necessary to replace intravenous catheters every 72 hours, but today manufacturers point

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complications when inserting or maintaining intravenous catheters?”

- “Do you provide constant rate infusions for pain management?”
- “Do you use a pump to administer these drugs?”
- “Where would you say fluid administration ranks with regard to the importance of treating ill or injured patients?”

Some veterinarians have concerns about the practice of disposing of the unused portion of fluid in an open bag, rather than saving money by using them on the next patient. Using a fluid bag on more than one patient can lead to the

out that a sterilely placed catheter that is bandaged and examined daily can be used between 10-14 days. Proper insertion technique, frequent monitoring and patient cooperation can help extend its life, according to experts.

As a rule, fluids, catheters and administration sets can be purchased for as little as \$10 – not a bad price to pay for better patient care, for preparedness for emergencies that require fluid or drug administration, and for the ability to monitor hematological parameters in patients. By helping their customers appreciate the cost benefits of fluid administration, reps are that much closer to helping them provide the best possible level of care. ■

**Editor's note:** *Vet-Advantage* would like to acknowledge the contribution of Wayne E. Wingfield, MS, DVM, DACVS, DACVECC, emeritus professor of emergency and critical care medicine at Colorado State University's College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Science, liaison to Abbott Animal Health.