Dental Procedures for the Long-in-the-Tooth

Many owners of older pets believe that their pet's age precludes dental procedures done under anesthesia; however, this is often untrue. If the patient “passes” a complete preoperative workup, proper anesthetics are used, and procedures and monitoring are correct, a positive outcome of a dental procedure done with anesthesia should be expected. Untreated dental disease is a far greater concern, as it may progress and reduce quality of life. Ideally, owners should be taught the importance of dental hygiene when their pet is young. This also requires education of the veterinarian and staff. The American Veterinary Dental Society (800-332-AVDS) is a good source of updated information. Other resources are available and can be found in this article. Most clients have 3 hot buttons: fees, anesthesia, and extraction. All 3 topics need to be discussed during the initial visit. The veterinarian should provide a written treatment plan and discuss the entire procedure with the client. This article discusses and explains in detail 10 steps necessary for complete prophylaxis. These steps are (1) preliminary evaluation, (2) supragingival gross calculus removal, (3) periodontal probing and charting, (4) subgingival calculus removal, (5) detection of missed plaque and calculus, (6) polishing, (7) sulcus irrigation and fluoride treatment, (8) periodontal diagnostics, (9) final charting, and (10) home care. Some patients will need more extensive treatment of periodontal disease.

COMMENTARY: This article has excellent information for providing proper dental care for geriatric patients. Poor dental health can decrease quality of life, an important consideration for all patients regardless of age.—Patricia Thomblison, DVM, MS