Home Testing Helps Owners, Vets Regulate Diabetic Pets

When Shelby developed diabetes several years ago, it was difficult for her owner to regulate the cat’s blood glucose level between visits to the veterinarian.

Subsequently, Shelby, an 18-year-old female domestic shorthair, failed to show any signs of improvement and disease management while at home.

Much like human diabetics, dogs and cats can benefit from daily monitoring to ensure proper blood glucose levels are maintained and to catch any potentially dangerous fluctuations before they reach a critical stage, some veterinarians say. Since it’s impractical for some owners to take their pets to a clinic for daily or even monthly checkups, veterinarians are discovering that in-home monitoring of blood glucose levels can help diabetic dogs and cats by providing additional information to assist in their prescribed treatment.

Sara Ford, DVM, a veterinarian who specializes in treating diabetic animals at the VCA Emergency Animal Hospital and Referral Center in San Diego, evaluated Shelby in December 2006. Dr. Ford determined that the cat was a perfect candidate to have her owner, Helen Phillips, try in-home glucose monitoring using a portable hand-held meter.

Not a Cure-All by Itself
Many factors beyond a veterinarian’s control can affect an animal’s BG level, such as changes in activity, stress and diet. Infrequent monitoring may reduce a veterinarian’s ability to address the patient’s changing physiology over time and correctly determine whether the prescribed medication is working. In-home monitoring can help improve a pet’s health by augmenting a veterinarian’s treatment plan.

Home monitoring doesn’t replace professional care, but it can foster greater communication between veterinarians and pet owners, Ford said.
Working closely with their veterinarian, pet owners learn how in-home monitoring can lead them to detect potential problems that could become more serious.

Through frequent monitoring and instructions for diabetes management at home, veterinarians have the opportunity to see healthier patients and more satisfied clients who continue to rely on their advice for supplies and ongoing consultations, Ford said.

Glucose levels of diabetic pets, especially cats, can increase by more than 100 points due to the stress of anticipating a trip to the veterinarian’s office and the experience of being treated.

“Once you get them into a clinic setting where you have dogs barking and a lot of commotion, you might not get an accurate reading,” said Ron Lytle, DVM, of Abbott Animal Health in Abbott Park, Ill. Abbott makes the AlphaTRAK Meter, a portable unit for dogs and cats that can also be used for home BG monitoring.

**Model of Efficiency**

Recommending home monitoring carries financial benefits, Dr. Lytle notes. Clients performing home monitoring help make a practice more efficient by reducing the need for technicians to complete glucose curve tests. The AlphaTRAK Meter can hold up to 250 readings, which can be evaluated in minutes, as opposed to glucose curve tests that can take several hours to complete.

Additionally, veterinarians can see profits by selling a glucose meter kit, test strips and lancets, as well as charging fees to get the client oriented with the meter and to evaluate the readings on scheduled visits.

“When presented with the option of home monitoring, many people are open to the idea,” Lytle says. “At that point they’re already sticking their animal twice a day with insulin anyway, so they’re willing to do that.”

Phillips, Shelby’s owner, found the device easy to use, and an effective way to regulate Shelby and collect and share information with her veterinarian. Little blood is needed for home testing. The AlphaTRAK Meter, for example, requires just 0.3uL of blood for capillary sampling every day. Results are available within 15 seconds.

“It’s less stressful to both me and my cat to know that I’ve got her situation under control,” Phillips says. “That makes me feel comfortable about what I’m doing.”
Shelby was considered well-regulated in about two months through home monitoring and treatment modifications by her veterinarian. The feline continues to enjoy a quiet life at home.

Another Success Story
Home monitoring also proved to be a great option for Mary Johnson and Rolo, the 9-year-old male Yorkshire terrier she rescued from an animal shelter last year. Rolo’s initial exam with Ford showed he has diabetes, which at the time was unregulated. The condition left him emaciated and blind with mature cataracts.

Since Rolo was a rescue dog and more leery about unfamiliar surroundings and hospital visits, Ford suggested home care as the best course of action.

“Rolo is a nervous dog that would not have provided us with accurate blood glucose measurements in the hospital,” Ford said. “Due to his chronic pancreatitis, Rolo’s glycemic control would have suffered during pancreatitis flare-ups. The complications from the diabetes would probably cause him to have to be hospitalized, resulting in expense and emotional distress for the owner.

“Monitoring Rolo’s glucose at home, we were able to maintain glycemic control even in the face of pancreatitis, and keep him out of the hospital.”

After two months of home monitoring, along with proper diet, exercise and insulin adjustments, Rolo’s diabetes was well under control. Cataract surgery a month later brought back his sight.

“He’s gained weight, and he’s happy and healthy,” Johnson says. “I think being able to monitor him daily from home made a big difference. It’s not a big deal to him; he just sits there really sweetly.”

Giving owners the ability to monitor their diabetic pets at home could reduce hospital trips and possibly improve the long-term health of a diabetic dog or cat.

“Both of these cases are good examples of owners who recognized the importance of home blood glucose testing to enhance the health of their pets,” Ford says.