You may be wondering why exams are needed yearly and why your veterinarian recommends bloodwork. Pets age much faster than we do. Although the old adage of 1 year = 7 years is not accurate for the entire life of your pet (see table), they are squeezing a lifetime into 12-15 years. Often pets are seen as puppies and kittens then not again for 4-5 years. If you own a 70lb lab that is like waiting 30-37 years between visits; a cat would be equivalent to 25-33 years. Can you imagine if you didn’t go to the doctor for 7 years? A lot can happen to your pets during that time that you may not notice.

 It is recommended that your pet visit a veterinarian every 6-12 months for an exam. Doing a thorough exam can tell you much more about your pet than you may realize. Veterinarians are trained to pick up on subtle cues such as changes in weight, behavior, activity, and also differences in gait patterns that may indicate hidden pain. During the exam your veterinarian will assess the pet from nose to tail including the teeth, mouth, nose, throat, heart, lungs, joints, bones, lymph nodes, eyes, ears, gastrointestinal system, skin and much more. They palpate the abdomen to check for any masses and changes in organ size. They palpate the skin to feel for any masses as well as assess lymph node size to help rule out cancers or infection.

 Bloodwork is recommended at least yearly for pets as they age. Depending on the pet’s age, breed, and physical exam findings the bloodwork may include a chemistry panel, complete blood count (CBC), electrolytes, urinalysis, and thyroid level. A chemistry panel includes tests to assess the kidneys, liver, and pancreas, and includes a blood glucose or “sugar” level. A CBC is used to assess the different blood cells and the ratios of each and helps evaluate for anemia, dehydration, blood parasites, and some types of cancer. Electrolytes will show if the pet has an imbalance and can also help monitor certain diseases, especially kidney disease. A urinalysis assesses the kidneys and checks for urinary tract infections. The thyroid level indicates if a pet has thyroid disease. Low thyroid is common in certain dog breeds and high thyroid is common in cats 7 years and older. These tests can be performed here at our hospital allowing for a quicker diagnosis and therefore quicker treatment.

 More routine tests include a 4dx test, feline leukemia (FeLV)/ feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV) test and a fecal exam. The 4dx test will check dogs for heartworm infection which is caused by mosquitoes and Ehrlichia, Anaplasmosis, and Lyme disease which are tick borne diseases common in our area. The FeLV/FIV for cats test for these common diseases- early detection helps us to manage them better as well as provide guidelines for other cats in the family. A fecal exam checks for intestinal parasites your pet may have obtained through the environment.

 The earlier we can detect an issue the sooner we are able to treat and hopefully cure an illness/ disease. Bloodwork can frequently detect an illness before the pet shows outward signs. 10% of pets have some underlying disease but appear healthy to their owners. Animals with kidney disease have lost about 65% of their function before we can find it on blood or urine tests and 85% before they show clinical signs.

 In addition to blood tests our hospital has a fully equipped surgery suite and each pet has a dedicated surgery technician. The patient is monitored continuously for blood pressure, carbon dioxide output, blood oxygen level, heart rate, respiratory rate, temperature, and ECG. All pets are on IV fluids, heating blankets, and have a customized pain management plan started prior to any procedure.

 Our hospital also has a digital radiograph machine which may be very beneficial in diagnosing a pet. Digital radiographs are quick and allow the doctor to interpret images immediately. We are then able to bring the radiograph images into the exam room to review and discuss with the owner. We also have a digital dental radiograph unit which is invaluable at detecting dental disease under the gum line.

Here at Antrim our devoted doctors and staff will answer all of your questions and address your concerns to the best of our ability. We attend numerous lectures and seminars to stay current on the latest information. Our doctors will explain the diagnosis entirely along with any options available. They do not hesitate to consult with a specialist in order to give you and your pet the highest standard of care.

Hopefully this article has given you some insight as to what is happening during your pet’s physical so that the next time your pet is in for an exam you can appreciate exactly what is occurring and ask any questions you may have. So call today to schedule your pet’s thorough exam. Remember, your precious family members are unable to tell you when something is not right so be sure to take preventative measures before it is too late. Give your furry friends the best chance at a long and healthy life.

