

## How to be an advocate for your pet with cancer

Making decisions for pets with cancer, and supporting patients that are otherwise unable to speak for themselves, can be incredibly challenging.

If you're lucky enough to know your vet well and trust their advice then the journey is often smoother. A good sign is a vet that listens well and asks questions to understand your needs, values and wishes for your pet.

Asking yourself the following questions may help you feel more confident about the care your pet is receiving:

- Does your vet know what type of cancer it is?
  - It is never possible to diagnose cancer without taking a biopsy and having a pathologist assess the tissue sample under a microscope.
  - This means sending the biopsy away to a pathology lab and waiting a few days (or sometimes a few weeks) for results.
  - You can always ask to see the pathology report if you would like more confidence over the diagnosis.
  
- Does your vet know where the cancer is?
  - Is it a cancer that can spread – e.g. to lymph nodes or lungs?
  - If so has a biopsy of the local lymph node been performed, X-rays or CT of the chest?
  
- Have you been offered referral to a specialist?
  - If you haven't this is something you can always ask for.
  - Being referred to see a specialist doesn't commit you to any treatment or diagnostic tests.
  - The specialist can discuss the diagnosis, prognosis and treatment options with you in detail, you can then go away and discuss with family/friends and your GP vet and decide what is the best way forward.
  - If referral to a specialist is not possible (e.g. too expensive, too far away) you can ask your vet to contact an online oncologist for a telemedicine consultation. This will give your GP vet up-to-date information regarding your pet and you can then consider what treatment to pursue.
  
- Do you understand discharge instructions, medications, treatment plan etc?
  - Don't be afraid to ask for this information in writing.
  - It is your vet's/ vet specialist's job to make sure you leave the consultation with a good understanding of what has happened and what you can expect to happen at home.
  
- What if you still don't feel comfortable?
  - It is okay to get a second or third opinion before making decisions.

- Try to build a support network for yourself and have a friend or family member join you for consultations.
- Take notes during consultations to help you remember important points.

To be a great advocate you need to be assertive and negotiate well with your vet or vet specialist. Never be aggressive towards your vet. Vets want the best for your pet too. Every pet owner and every pet is different and your vet/ vet specialist needs your cooperation.

Being an advocate for your pet with cancer can be hard work. The more support you can build for yourself the better. Above all trust your instincts and your love for your pet – no one knows your pet as well as you.

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