

# Becoming a Partner with Your Vet

*Your Dog's Best Health* by Nancy Kay, D.V.M.

Florence Scarinci

Several years ago, for no apparent reason, my dog began to squint and blink. Thinking that either the cat had decided to teach her a lesson or she had run into a branch in the yard while furiously chasing a squirrel, I rushed her to my trusted veterinarian. But after a week of my following the vet's instructions, her eye showed little improvement. So my vet arranged an appointment at a veterinary specialty clinic with the only canine ophthalmologist on Long Island at the time.

I had heard of this man's reputation: a very fine veterinarian, the one who could save a dog's vision or eye, a deft healer of canines—but with no bedside manner for the client, the pet parent, the person who wrote the check for his invaluable services. A recognized authority, this vet always had an entourage of aspiring canine specialists in attendance, but he had been known to push clients out of the way and to cut off their questions. So I stood with my back pressed to the examining room door and my lips tightly sealed, hardly daring to breathe while he scraped my dog's cornea and applied what I was to learn later (but not from him) was a medicated contact lens. As soon as he was finished, he left the treatment room. A vet tech attached an e-collar and handed me some medications and several sheets describing exactly what had been done for what I read on the cover page was an indolent ulcer, along with instructions for what I should do during the next two weeks. Then I was shown the door and given directions to the cashier.

I endured this treatment because the man was the only canine ophthalmologist within a reasonable distance and because he was a skilled practitioner with the highest reputation. Had I been able to find an equally qualified vet who would treat me as a partner in my dog's healing process, or at the very least with respect, I would have run, not walked away from that clinic.

Dr. Nancy Kay, American College of Veterinary Internal Medicine specialist, award-winning author of *Speaking for Spot: Be the Advocate Your Dog Needs to Live a*

*Happy, Healthy, Longer Life*, and writer of a well-known blog of the same title, might have had that ophthalmologist in mind when she wrote *Your Dog's Best Health: A Dozen Reasonable Things to Expect From Your Vet* (CreateSpace, 2011, ISBN 978-1466381957, paperback \$10.00). With access to the Internet and its vast store of facts both reliable and questionable, the computer savvy, information empowered client now has heightened expectations for qualities in the veterinarian she chooses to be her dog's health care provider.

Recent studies in the *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association* report that, while once it was enough for a veterinarian to be "kind, gentle, and respectful," it is now incumbent upon the vet to open up a dialog with the client and to treat her as a partner in health care. That includes discussing in nontechnical terms both the condition and the treatment options; not just mentioning but clearly enumerating the cost of each option in written form; allowing access to the back of the hospital and having access to 24 hour care; asking the right questions about vaccinations, diet, and the pet's role in the family; allowing further contact via email; and educating the client on the sources of reliable Internet information. In fact, as Dr. Kay points out, doing so contributes both to the dog's recovery and to the client's peace of mind regarding the ultimate choice of type of treatment. Dr. Kay conveys all this information in her usual breezy, humorous, jargon-free, and easily understandable style.

But remember this book is about a dialog, a partnership. While Dr. Kay devotes the majority of chapters to the veterinarian's responsibility, she also reserves some space for the client's part of the relationship, what your veterinarian can expect from you. All of her recommendations and expectations are practical, sensible, and as the subtitle says, "reasonable."

Buy two copies of this book. Keep one for yourself and give one to your vet. My vet doesn't need it—she already fulfills her part of the bargain. The second copy that I buy will be sent to that canine ophthalmologist.

