

Book Berners

A Review of Dr. Nancy Kay's, *Your Dog's Best Health: A Dozen Reasonable Things to Expect From Your Vet*

Reviewed by Lori Friedli, MSLIS

Dr. Nancy Kay, author of *Speaking for Spot: Be the Advocate Your Dog Needs to Live a Happy, Healthy, Longer Life*, published in 2008 (reviewed in the October 2008 issue of *The Alpenhorn*), and her newest title, *Your Dog's Best Health: A Dozen Reasonable Things to Expect from Your Vet*, addresses her readers as if she is speaking to each individually. She has written these titles because she wants you, the reader, to “become informed and involved, and to receive the best possible health care for that amazing dog with whom you share your home and heart.”

Dr. Kay earned her veterinary degree at Cornell University's College of Veterinary Medicine and completed her residency

at the University of California, Davis Veterinary School. She is a board-certified specialist in the American College of Veterinary Internal Medicine and has been practicing small animal internal medicine for 30 years.

In his forward to *Your Dog's Best Health*, Dr. Michael Cavenagh explains that we are so willing to take care of our animals because our animals give us so much in return. Taking care entails being responsible and making proper choices for our pets, which is a very big job. Dr. Kay notes that in the years she has been practicing, animal medical care has evolved and, in fact, become high-tech. Where once pet families had access to a family vet, they now have access to a range of specialists including: ophthalmologists, cardiologists, oncologists, dermatologists, surgeons, and neurologists. There are veterinarians who specialize in

nutrition, holistic treatment, western medicine, Asian medicine, or the combination of all three. Procedures, such as advanced cancer treatments, and technologies such as MRIs and sonograms once available only to humans are now available to pets as well. Dr. Kay notes that veterinary medicine is ahead of human medicine in using stem cell treatment that is effectively treating arthritis. We need to advocate for our pets simply because there are so many choices to make.

In *Speaking for Spot*, Dr. Kay introduced the concept of advocating for our dogs' health. In *Your Dog's Best Health*, she lays out a detailed blueprint for doing so. While some readers may think it unusual to read a book about pet-patient advocacy written by a practicing vet, this reviewer will ask, “Who is better to explain how to establish a good method of communication than the second most important part of your animals' health team?” Note the use of the term “second.” This is because Dr. Kay believes that because you know your dog best, you are the first member of that partnership.

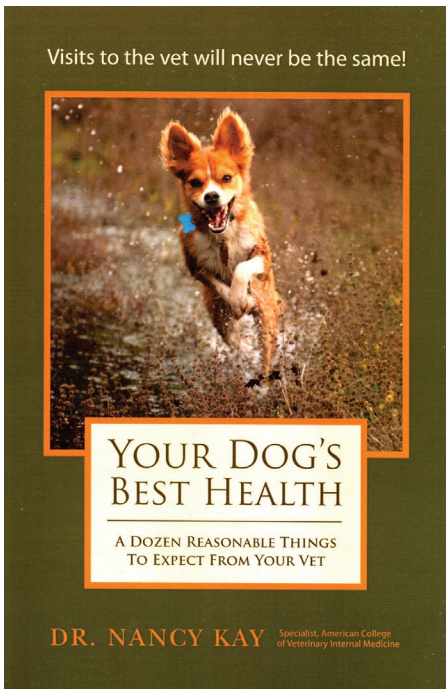
Dr. Kay speaks to veterinarians' dual role, treating the “patients” (the four-legged) and caring for the “clients” (the two-legged one on the other end of the leash) emotional and sometimes financial well-being at the same time. In *Speaking for Spot* (p. 2) she writes:

As veterinarians we practice medicine on our “patients” and practice social work (sometimes of a hospice nature), instructional assistance for at-home dog-care techniques, financial planning, and even “psychotherapy” for our “clients.”

She explains that communication between us, the clients (the consumers of veterinary medicine), and our veterinarians is a key ingredient creating a positive outcome, both in terms of our pets' health as well as our own peace of mind. There is nothing more ideal than creating an interactive working partnership and an effective working relationship with our veterinarians, their staffs, and all who interact with our dogs in their healthcare environment.

Dr. Kay defines reasonable expectations one might have when choosing a veterinary practice. She devotes a chapter to each. These include:

- **Relationship Centered Care**—Dr. Kay defines two styles of communication between physicians and their human



- patients—“paternalistic care” and “relationship centered care”—and maintains that these same types of communication exist between pet owners and their veterinarians. In relationship centered care situations veterinarians listen to and hold their clients’ opinions in high regard and are open to discussion about their patients’ healthcare options—collaborative decision making. In “paternalistic care,” the relationships that veterinarians have with their clients are more formal in nature. Generally the doctor makes all the decisions in these situations. Dr. Kay recommends the less old-fashioned relationship centered care model.
- **Round-the-Clock Care**—Dr. Kay suggests inquiring about supervised 24-hour care. She describes types of care and cautions against those practices that leave hospitalized patients alone all night.
 - **Access to “the Back” of the Hospital**—While not all practices allow this, some do allow full access or limited access to the internal areas of the hospital where surgeries are performed and patients are housed. She recommends a look around.
 - **Discussion of All (treatment) Options, Regardless of Cost**—This is optimal because decisions need to be made and there are many factors, including financial ones, that need to be considered.
 - **Written Cost Estimates**—These are necessary to avoid after-the-fact surprises and complications.
 - **Referral to Second Opinions and Specialized Care**
 - **Discussion About your Dog’s Vaccinations**—The protocols of vaccinations are constantly changing. Each pet owner must understand and be involved in decisions about when and whether to vaccinate.
 - **Discussion About Your Dog’s Diet**
 - **Discussion About Your Internet Research**—More information choices and Internet access to information empower pet families to make informed choices. This is the reviewer’s favorite chapter. Dr. Kay teaches the reader to discriminate between information sources by regarding TLD (top level domain, or the three letters, .org, .gov, .edu, that appear in any Internet address). She also discusses reliable resources to consult including the breed’s national organization and disease-specific online forums. She warns consumers to beware of anecdotal information and business-sponsored websites.
 - **Communicating Via E-mail**—Dr. Kay lays out the benefits and pitfalls of this type of communication.

- **Visiting Your Dog When He Is Hospitalized**—Dr. Kay notes that it is important to inquire about this for two reasons. The first is that, although there are no studies that prove it, Dr. Kay believes that it is beneficial to a dog’s recovery to see his or her beloved family. The second reason is that it is better for your peace of mind to know that your dog is healing comfortably.
- **Being With Your Dog at the Very End of His Life**—Dr. Kay believes that “of all the experiences we humans endure, being with a beloved pet during the euthanasia process is one of the most difficult, yet most treasured.” (p. 81).

Dr. Kay advises that since you are your dog’s best medical advocate, it is your right to ask questions. If your vet does not allow this, Dr. Kay suggests that it is within your power to make a change.

In her final chapter, Dr. Kay speaks to the topic of What Your Veterinarian Expects From You. She outlines some very reasonable expectations, which include bringing all your dog’s medications to your appointment and the very simple, “arriving on time.”

Both *Speaking for Spot* and *Your Dog’s Best Health* provide the readers with helpful strategies for becoming better consumers of veterinary medicine and effective and successful advocates for our dogs’ health. Note: The larger and more comprehensive *Speaking for Spot* has two magnificent appendices that detail and illustrate parts of a dog’s body, describe common symptoms of a range of diseases, and give the reader a hint about what information your veterinarian may ask. It will serve as a wonderful reference tool for any dog family. This reviewer encourages all readers to re-visit this title and to visit Dr. Nancy’s blog at <http://speakingforspot.com/blog/>

About the reviewer

Lori Friedli is a librarian, a citizen of the US, and a citizen of the Canton of Bern, Switzerland. She loves all four-footed creatures.

