



## Asking Your Veterinarian Tough Questions:

### *Reasonable Expectations*

**P**EOPLE WANT THE VERY BEST FOR their dogs and, when it comes to veterinary care, they are expecting more than ever before. What's responsible for this change? No doubt, the popularity of the Internet has fueled what I call "The Age of the Empowered Client." Gone are the days of simply following doc's orders. "Dr. Google" is teaching people how to become informed, savvy consumers of veterinary medicine. Do I believe such changing expectations are a good thing? You betcha! The changes I've witnessed all make wonderful sense—in fact, I wonder why some of them have taken so darned long to catch on. Most importantly, these transformations clearly enhance the quality of care provided to the patient—and nothing is more important than that.

This is the first in a series of articles describing veterinary care-related expectations that are on their way to becoming mainstream. What happens if your vet doesn't readily embrace such changes? Employ some respectful discussion, patience and persistence, but if your vet simply won't budge, it might be time to find a new teammate for you and your best friend.

*If you desire relationship-centered care from your vet ... know that this is a perfectly reasonable expectation.*

#### **Relationship-Centered Care**

This expectation is my personal favorite because, once it is fulfilled, satisfaction of other expectations will naturally follow. It is perfectly reasonable for you to expect "relationship-centered care" from your veterinarian. This is a style of communication in which your vet holds your opinions and feelings in high regard and allows enough time during the office visit to hear them. She recognizes the unique role your dog plays in your life and is a willing source of empathy and support. Rather than *telling* you what to do, vets who practice relationship-centered care discuss the pros and cons of all options before making a recommendation. They believe in collaborative decision-making. Compare this to "paternalistic care" in which the vet maintains an emotional distance and recommends only what she believes is best without consideration of her patient's or client's unique situation. She provides no significant opportunities for discussion or collaboration.

Relationship-centered care is not for everyone—some people truly prefer to be told what to do—certainly the way I feel when my car is in need of repair! However, if you desire relationship-centered care from your vet (or, for that matter, your own physician), know that this is a perfectly reasonable expectation. How do you find a veterinarian who employs this style of communication? Schmooze with neighbors, dog park friends, trainers and people who work at your local pet/feed stores, grooming parlors, boarding facilities and animal shelters. Ask the staff of your local emergency hospital

for their recommendations. They will have a clear sense of the communication styles employed by the family vets who refer their after-hour emergencies to their facility. Once you've created a list of possible good choices, arrange some interview visits to determine who deserves the honor of becoming your dog's doctor.

#### **Access to Round-the-Clock Care**

If your dog is sick enough to require hospitalization or has just undergone a major surgical procedure, how will he or she be cared for overnight? As much as the mere thought of this makes me cringe, I must advise you that even though your dog is "hospitalized," in some veterinary clinics this will involve no supervision whatsoever from closing time at night (perhaps 6:00 PM) until early morning when the first employees arrive. What if your dog manages to slip out of his Elizabethan collar and chews open his surgical incision? What if he is experiencing pain? What if he vomits and aspirates the material into his lungs? Please think about all of these "what ifs" whenever hospitalization is recommended, and ask how your best friend will be cared for overnight. Many don't think to ask, likely because they cannot fathom the possibility that adequate supervision would not be provided.


It is perfectly reasonable to expect round-the-clock care, and there are a few options for making this happen. While a 24-hour hospital staffed with a veterinarian is ideal, this simply does not exist in all communities. If it does exist in your neck of the woods, by all

means take advantage. Here are some other viable options:

**Vet Observation** A veterinarian comes into the clinic multiple times during the night to check on the hospitalized patients (some vets prefer to take their patients home with them overnight to make monitoring and supervision more convenient).

**Tech Observation** A skilled veterinary nurse (technician) comes into the clinic multiple times during the night to check on the hospitalized patients and can contact the vet should the need arise.

**Home Observation** Your dog or cat spends the night at home with you, but only after you receive *thorough* monitoring instructions along with a way to reach your vet should questions or concerns arise. As scary as this might sound, this remains a better option than leaving your best little buddy completely unsupervised overnight—imagine how you would feel lying in a hospital bed, hooked up to intravenous fluids and no one entering your room to check on you for twelve long hours!

Does your vet practice relationship-centered care? If hospitalized, how will your dog receive round-the-clock care? Please share your answers with us at [thebark.com](http://thebark.com) 

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#### COAXING THE STRAY

frenchfried  
near, all tail and ears,  
she smiles, then grins, steers  
without fear  
to me, sighs, settles at my side

—Lee Pelham Cotton



# Knitted Dogs

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