



The Pet Paws



with Jenny Hopkins

THE BIG C

According to some well established statistics, there are 61 million pet dogs in the United States. Half of those dogs will develop some type of cancer. The Animal Cancer Institute estimates that there are roughly 4 million new cancer diagnosis in dogs each year.

Whichever numbers you believe, that accounts for a lot of sick dogs.

If your dog does develop cancer what do you do? What are some avenues that you can explore? What are some of the newest treatments? What can you expect from various treatments? Will your dog suffer? Is it better to euthanize a dog with cancer? Traditional treatments - surgery, radiation or chemotherapy? Or holistic methods? What are the chances for remission? Dietary needs? Supplements?

This is all too much to ponder when you have just learned that your companion canine has cancer. In many cases, like a diagnosis of lymphoma, a decision about a course of treatment must be made quickly as life expectancy without treatment is very short.

An invaluable resource is Help Your Dog Fight Cancer: An Overview of Home Care Options by Laurie Kaplan. I truly hope I never have to seek advice from this well-written manual. But if the numbers are even somewhat accurate, I will avail myself of crucial information at some time - for my dogs or for friends' dogs.

An accomplished writer and former editor of Catnip magazine, Ms. Kaplan found herself in the unenviable position of - my dog has cancer ... now what?

There were no publications available in 2000 when her beloved Siberian husky Bullet was diagnosed with lymphoma. Denial kicked in - how could her healthy, strong nine-year-old pal be ill? There must be a mistake.

So begins Bullet and Ms. Kaplan's journey expertly chronologed in this book.

For about a month the book sat on a corner of my desk waiting for my perusal. I always found reasons to put off the task of reading about a woman, her dog and cancer. I expected a maudlin, touchy-feely piece about a dog that made it because of faith and perseverance. Instead I found a well written exhaustively researched book that covers all the bases.

I liked Ms. Kaplan's philosophy. Whatever you decide to do after you learn your dog has cancer - stick by your decision. Don't second guess yourself. Provide yourself with the facts and go from there. Can you afford cancer treatment? Can you handle the care of a very sick dog? Can you handle criticism from friends and family who may not agree with your course of care whether it be palliative or curative?

Ms. Kaplan does not sugar coat dog cancer. After reading her book I had to ask myself some hard questions. Would I take the curative path? I cannot answer that question now. But I do know that if I ever need to make a decision I am better prepared after reading this book.

As a pet columnist I hear from so many people who enter into the world of cancer with their companion animals.

Some say it is because our pets live

longer and we care for them better. I suppose this could be partially true. However, I remember some dogs and cats of mine living very long lives. I believe there may have been a lack of documentation of cause of death years ago. Most people did not take their pets in for yearly checkups. When a dog died the cause may have been speculative at best.

I have always been very close to my companion animals but that was not common about a half century ago. Dogs were not cared for as well as today. Neutering was not common, vaccines were optional and little was know of nutritional needs. Most dogs were fed scraps and kibble and cats would often fend for themselves.

Ms. Kaplan does offer some ideas of why dogs get cancer. She points to two generally accepted causes: exposure to lawn chemicals as the primary cause of lymphoma and obesity that leads to bladder cancer. Though not documented second hand smoke and annual vaccines may be a causative factor. Talk to your vet and make an educated decision about vaccines. Ms. Kaplan presents a fair analysis of the vaccine issue - for that alone I would buy the book.

Cancer treatment is cutting edge veterinary care today. Thanks to Ms. Kaplan's experience with Bullet the book provides a list of contacts of vet schools, chemotherapy protocols and a plethora of supplements and their usage. She has done all the groundwork. It is up to you then - the caregiver - to decide what road to take.

Chemotherapy kills cells. The desired effect is to kill the bad cancer cells without harming the good cells too much. This is where side effects come in play. It is best to know what may happen so you will be prepared. Ms. Kaplan also outlines what you can do to alleviate side effects. She has created low carbohydrate meal plans that you can make at home. They are very clear to understand and are supplemented with full color photos. Her recipes would work well for healthy dogs too.

Specialist veterinary care is expensive. To avoid having to make a cancer care decision based upon finances, consider pet medical insurance. Many companies now offer cancer care riders. Ms. Kaplan has established the Magic Bullet Fund, through the Perseus Foundation, to benefit dogs with cancer.

For more information log onto www.perseusfoundation.org/TheMagicBulletFund.

Pictured:
Laurie Kaplan
and Bullet

