Health Flash

By Donna Russell, COA Health Chair

Be Your Dog's Advocate

At some time during our dog's lives, we may find them injured, ill or just in need of routine care. We take them to the Vet. The Vet may be an experienced doctor who we have a long time relationship with. The Vet may have just joined the practice we are already familiar with. We may be looking for a new place to bring our dog, due to retirement, a move, dissatisfaction or any number of reasons.

Please be your dog's best advocate. Here is a list of some of the things I feel are important to consider when your dog goes to the Vet.

- 1. Write down a list of symptoms, questions, concerns and points you want to make and take it to the visit. It is easy to forget some things if you try to do it from memory.
- 2. Remain present for your dog's visit. Ask to be present for all tests and procedures. I know this may not be possible for all visits, but you can keep in touch by phone and ask them to call you when the surgery or procedure is finished.
- 3. It is okay to ask questions...many questions. Your Vet is a person, just like you and they should not be put on a pedestal. A good Vet should encourage open communication and not be offended if you question their judgement or plan.
- 4. Ask for an explanation, in detail, of any treatment, tests, procedures or medications the Vet plans for your dog. Get it in writing! If you feel uncomfortable with any part, speak up! if you still feel uncomfortable, leave and get a second opinion.
- 5. Ask who will be performing the tests or procedures. Find out if they have Veterinary students or Vet Tech students doing clinical rotations. They may be doing part or all of the procedures.
- 6. Once you take your pet home, watch them closely. If anything at all does not seem right, go with your gut instinct! Call the vet, IMMEDIATELY, or take your dog to an Emergency facility. Some dogs tend to be more quiet and stoic when they are hurting a bit or not feeling well. So when they really start to act uncomfortable and different from their usual self, their illness or injury could be very serious to critical.
- 7. If you have any doubt about the personnel at your Vet's office or care your dog is/has received, report the matter to your "State Veterinary Medical Association. Ask your vet to report a medication or vaccine reaction to the FDA and follow up that it was done. If not, you can report it yourself.
- 8. Educate yourself! There are many resources which are available on the internet. Post a question on the COA-L group.

Our dogs trust us to be their voice in sickness and in health. You must trust yourself and be the best advocate for your dog that you can be. You should be able to trust your Vet, but don't forget to trust your own knowledge, know-how and instinct.