

Honesty Is the Safest Policy!

When a pet gets sick and requires the medical attention of a veterinarian, pet parents expect the veterinarian to make their pet well! They expect (and often demand) the best care, the latest treatments, and the most advanced diagnostics available. But often it is pet parents themselves who sabotage their pets' medical outcomes.

Too often pet parents withhold information or outright lie to veterinarians. The reasons are variable:

- A fear of being judged
- An aversion to being lectured
- A desire to present their pet's overall condition in a positive light
- A want for something from the doctor (i.e.: a specific medication or diagnosis)
- Anxiety about disappointing the veterinarian

This deceit could force a veterinarian to order unnecessary and potentially invasive tests to diagnose a pet's problem. There's a chance a veterinarian could prescribe a medication that would negatively react with a drug the pet is already receiving. As a board-certified emergency/critical care and internal medicine specialist, my patient population is unique. They're sicker. They're more fragile. Often times I only see the sickest of the sick! This means the stakes are particularly high, and deceit and non-compliance could truly be life threatening.

An All-Too-Common Example...

Below I've highlighted an all-too-common scenario where a lie could spell disaster for your pet!

Let's say you're the pet parent of an older American Cocker Spaniel, and you notice he's having increasing difficulty getting up in his hind legs and jumping on the couch. People get aches and pains as they age. Since the same must be true for dogs, you decide to give your dog the same drug you take, a couple of aspirin. It helps you feel better, so it should help him too, right?

Let's also say that somewhere in the near future this dog to which you give

aspirin regularly without veterinary guidance for suspected arthritis is diagnosed with immune-mediated hemolytic anemia (IMHA - <http://criticalcaredvm.com/immune-mediated-hemolytic-anemia>). Your family veterinarian refers your dog to a board-certified veterinary internal medicine specialist for state-of-the-art medical care. When the specialist's asks you if your pet is receiving any medications, you purposefully decide not to share that you have been giving aspirin because you don't want to be lectured about given a medication to your dog without consulting a veterinarian. And of course there is no documentation of your aspirin administration in the medical records from your family veterinarian because s/he, too, has no idea you're giving this medication to your dog. After a thorough diagnostic investigation, the veterinary internal medicine specialist prescribes a steroid called prednisone, a mainstay medication for the treatment of IMHA in dogs.

This sounds great, right? WRONG! Aspirin or salicylic acid is a member of class of medications called non-steroid anti-inflammatory medications (NSAIDs). Steroids (like prednisone) and NSAIDs should *never* be given at the same time because of the very real potential for life-threatening complications, including perforation of the gastrointestinal tract and acute kidney injury (aka: acute kidney failure).

The Take Away Message...

In the ideal world pets would be healthy enough to never need a board-certified veterinary specialist. But we don't live in an ideal world. Pets get sick. They get really sick! And when families bring their pet to see us as veterinary specialists, we understand they're scared. They're anxious. They're often frustrated. Veterinary specialists take pride in their ability to connect with pet parents. We won't judge you. We purposefully schedule long consultations (commonly at least 60 minutes) simply to speak with you, meet and thoroughly examine your pet, and answer all of your questions. We want to give you the opportunity to explain your pet's situation, and we strive to foster an environment in which you feel you can be honest with us.

Wishing you wet nosed kisses,

cgb