# Beware of vets who try to manipulate clients

By Michael W. Fox June 25, 2014

### **Dear Dr. Fox:**

I recently had an appointment for my old dog, Rusty, to get a distemper vaccine, but I canceled. Rusty is 14 years old, and I had a bad feeling about going through with it.

My veterinarian's receptionist told me I would not be able to get Heartgard Plus for Rusty because I didn't get the vaccine or his annual checkup. Can Rusty get by without Heartgard?

Also, whenever I take in Rusty, my vet always wants to clean his teeth. I realize this is important, but when Rusty was 13, I was told he has a heart murmur. I think that his age makes it too risky, so I have refused to have it done. My vet told me he had cleaned the teeth of a dog who was 15.

Am I wrong in not getting the teeth cleaned, and is there somewhere else I could get the Heartgard Plus for Rusty? Do I have to get it from the vet? Can Rusty do without it?

Rusty is deaf, almost blind and has a weakness in his back legs.

### P.E.S., West Long Branch, N.J.

**DF:** I occasionally receive letters such as yours that make my blood boil. Most veterinarians are ethical and do not resort to this kind of emotional blackmail or client manipulation.

Many veterinarians are aware of the urgent need for proper dental care, and some can do a good job without having to give anesthetic to at-risk animals.

Consult with another veterinarian for the heartworm blood test and preventive medication. If there is any question about the need for a distemper vaccination first, ask for a blood titer test to determine whether it is needed.

### ELIXIR OF LIFE

## Dear Dr. Fox:

We had to have our 23-year-old cat euthanized yesterday. I credit her longevity to drinking water from the kitchen faucet all these years. You've written many times that fresh water is vital for cats' good health.

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We brought our beloved Sugar home to be buried. I put her blanket on the ottoman to be buried with her. Our other cats came over and smelled her, and we all said goodbye. This morning, one cat sat on the ottoman and "cried" a strange meow. It was very touching.

### M.D., St. Charles, Mo.

**DF:** My condolences and appreciation for your letter, emphasizing the importance of cats drinking plenty of fresh water, which, if your municipal water supply was of reasonable quality, probably contributed to her longevity.

But do check my Web site, www.drfoxvet.com, for the article "Pure Water for Cats and Dogs." In some cases, municipal tap water can make cats sick. You can see it when they improve dramatically after being given purified water. Declining potable water quality and availability are rapidly becoming the next global crisis.

Your letter also underscores what I have long advocated: Allow surviving animals to see the body of their companion for "closure." Some might ignore and seem indifferent and never show signs of loss or grief, but many do, just like the rest of us. I think that the strange meow you heard was the cry of a grieving feline soul.

### BARRED FROM BEDROOM

### **Dear Dr. Fox:**

I have a 12-year-old domestic shorthair tabby cat. I adopted him when he was a young kitten. He's an indoor cat, and he's one of two in the family.

Tiger is a very sociable cat who loves to be around the family. If someone is coming through the doorway, he runs to the door and waits for him or her to enter. He starts meowing as a greeting and puts his front paws up on your leg so that you will pet him. He has access to all areas of the house.

At night, I shut him out of my room because I am a light sleeper. He now sits outside my door at all hours of the night and meows to get in. Needless to say, I haven't been getting a lot of sleep. When he meows, I open my door and spray him with a water bottle, and he runs away. He does this several times a night. It seems as though just as I fall asleep again, he'll start meowing. When it gets really bad, I catch him and lock him in a hallway bathroom, where he has access to his litter box and water. I open the door and let him out as soon as I get up in the morning.

I have tried a spray deterrent around the outside of my door to keep him away. He doesn't do it every night, and he always does it by himself. I've never had problems with the other cat. How can I stop him?

# K.H., Springfield

**DF:** You are not the only one having your sleep disrupted by a cat. I wonder why you don't do what he wants and let him sleep with you? Let him come live on your bed, and, like one of my cats, he might really enjoy

sleeping beside you under a light blanket or towel.

Make sure he's not hungry before bedtime. He might enjoy some catnip or melatonin before turning in. As cats age, some develop a pattern of night restlessness that can be associated with chronic pain from arthritis or dementia. A few drops of fish oil in his food might help both conditions.

### TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE?

### **Dear Dr. Fox:**

Do you have any information on a new product called Pet Protector? It's a metallic disc worn on the collar that is supposed to provide chemical-free tick and flea protection.

I have used brewer's yeast as well as PetzLife's Complete Coat, but my dog still gets a few ticks and has contracted Lyme disease.

If this product works, it would seem to be a good solution.

### E.R., Bowie

DF: There is no 100 percent effective way of keeping fleas and ticks off our animals.

I am leery of most oral treatments that can kill these insects only when they get the drug from feeding on the treated animal's blood. This is not, therefore, going to stop flea-bite-allergic reactions or stop some tickborne disease such as Lyme disease or Powassan virus.

As for your query about the so-called electromagnetic field and energy Pet Protector for cats and dogs: I did a quick Internet search, and there are several sites claiming that it is simply a moneymaking scheme. A study by M.W. Dryden published in the Veterinary Parasitology Journal concluded that the "Cat and Dog's Tag" (as this device was known at the time) failed to prevent flea infestation, inhibit flea reproduction or repel existing flea infestations on cats.

### **HEALING TOUCH**

### **Dear Dr. Fox:**

My 5-year-old Labrador mix, Will (a.k.a. "Won't"), has been a surprising companion as I recover from recent back surgery. He's a goofy, happy pup who is usually immersed in whatever he is doing, be it chewing a toy, watching the world outside or snoozing.

When I returned from the hospital, he seemed to know every time I was about to stand up, and he would suddenly appear and "brace" so that I could use him for support. This is in spite of the fact that he has only three legs!

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Now that I'm doing physical therapy, he appears every time and gets right up to me as though he's trying to help. It makes me laugh and takes my mind off the exercises, so I find I'm doing more repetitions and also more often just to see what he will do.

Will is a certified "touch therapy" dog from Support Dogs Inc. in St. Louis, and I know he's brought much happiness and healing to others, but he's never been trained for any of the things he's done for me. Animals bring us such joy!

### S.B., Town and Country, Mo.

**DF:** Your letter joins many affirming that the empathic nature of dogs enables them to know when we are suffering and need help, and this ennobles them in our eyes.

This is not to ignore the fact that some dogs and other animals, including humans, simply become fearful and avoid coming close when a particular person is suffering.

It is notable that cats, in particular, will lie against a person's injured or painful body region. Their warmth and purring might help the healing process, especially the mending of broken bones.

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