

A FRIEND TO LISTEN

Those of you who know me know that I nursed my Bearded Collie Lennie through critical illness all through his life, he was nearly 14 years old when he died in July. It is tough doing this, you go to the Vets with a sick animal, you are stressed and worried, you pick up bits and pieces but not really what you need. When you get home all you have is disjointed information and still a sick animal to nurse.

The best defence to cope with any illness Human or Pet is information. The more information you can get the more you learn how to cope with the issue. Lennie was diagnosed at 18 months old with his first Auto Immune illness-----back then there was no internet to turn to, no way to find out how to help him.

About five years ago I was asked to join an Auto Immune Group, a Support Group. I was very sceptical, I had never been a member of a support group and initially could not see how it would help. But, I made the decision to join. That was one of the best decisions I ever made. Suddenly, I found a wealth of people in just the same situation as I was. I was over whelmed with caring for a sick pet, trying to do the best for him whilst I knew so little.

That was the beginning of the biggest learning curve ever. But-----Lennie's legacy is that through him I have learnt so much. Through him Paws4Pets was born in the Algarve. Through him my support group pawsacrossportugal was born, as yet though it has not progressed far. I was busy nursing him until I lost him and then too distraught to think about it at all.

These Groups are, obviously, internet based. You join the group and are then free to 'talk' to many other people. They are just what they say----a support group. People from all over the world join, thus giving 24 hour cover. Many times I have been sat on the computer in the middle of the night on to a support group trying to get help with Lennie or Sandy, my other dog with problems. It is so reassuring to get on there and find you are not alone, someone out there in the world has come across the problem you have. It is amazing how that problem, with the necessary information and experience of others then becomes more manageable.

For those of you who have never been to a support group, I will try and explain and dispel a few worries. The main function is a passage of information, also support, someone out there who knows just what you feel. For example, with Lennie, when he became incontinent a year ago, I put a comment on my AI group about incontinence, had anyone ever come across a sudden onset, if so what caused it. I was over whelmed by messages, first advising why it had happened, and second offering a way to make his life more bearable for what time he had left. I knew I could not solve this problem, the internet had given me that much information. I knew it was no

doubt the price he was paying for his many years of life on drugs. At 4 he was given 6 weeks to live, his drugs kept him alive, but ultimately he paid the price. Through all this information I was able to make an informed decision as to how I was going to manage his last problem. I did manage to make him comfortable for another four months-----purely on information gained from this support group. Another Lennie example, (sorry to be boring but it is him that has taught me so much!). A couple of years ago he was sprayed with a substance during a burglary at our house here. Because of his Auto Immune his skin was like tissue paper. Long, long story, but four months later the hole in his leg had been stitched several times and pulled apart. It was apparent it was never going to heal. I put a message out on the support group, within hours a lady on that group had posted the latest dressings from where she works. Using these dressings and many others that were sent, at no charge to myself, that hole healed within 6 weeks, a perfect cover. Without my support group that hole in Lennie's leg would never have healed.

A support group can never take the place of the experts-----but the information gained advises the questions to ask, perhaps products to ask about. You then gather as much information as you can and make an informed decision as to what you must do for your pet. Vets are fantastic in that they have to make their decisions without much input from the patient, our pet cannot tell them how they feel, it has to be assumed.

So, I have first hand experience of the help that can be gained from a support group. I have made friends over that five years-----some I have never met, they are just email addresses but those people have propped me up when it has been tough. It was my cyber friends who helped me to cope with Lennie's last weeks and have helped me cope since. There are so many people on the Algarve, often miles from family who could benefit from a friend on the end of the computer.

If you want to talk to me anytime I am available on my mobile 24/7, phone number 916 273 376. If you want to join the group please go to www.yahogroups.com and in 'search group' add pawsacrossportugal . That should get you to the group. Please join as I do know just how beneficial it can be, and that is from the worlds worst cynic----'support group- me no never', but it has been the best decision I ever made. If you have any problems with access to the group just ring me.

Protect your pet with knowledge

Jan Cobley
Paws4Pets

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