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Dear Veterinarian(s) and Staff Members-

Megaesophagus is a disorder that I have had the misfortune to diagnose only twice in 32 years of practice (graduated 1974). The lectures, refereed journal articles and textbooks do not BEGIN to give us practitioners "in the trenches" an adequate picture of how to successfully manage many of these patients. I don't think that ANY of us, even the gastroenterologists, have enough of these cases under our belts to offer pet owners the wide variety of options to treat these dogs. Unfortunately, many pets have probably been euthanized because of the inability of the owners to understand/manage the disorder, AND our lack of knowledge and experience to guide them.

To that end, I would like to suggest that you peruse the megaesophagus support group at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/megaesophagus/>. This is a group of megaesophagus dog-owners who have a wealth of knowledge and "experience" with hundreds of these pets. And, as a bonus, they do not practice "vet-bashing". They offer advice, always with the caveat to "check with your veterinarian".

They have literally dozens of suggestions as to how and what to feed these dogs, always explaining that no two patients are alike - some dogs can have liquid diet, some semi-moist; some can get all of their water from moistened food, some require Jell-O, some need subcutaneous fluids (most should NOT be allowed to drink free-choice); some can be fed 3-4 times daily, some require more frequent feedings; some (most) require H2 blockers or Proton Pump Inhibitor antacids, as well as a promotility drug such as cisapride or metoclopramide (I know, I know, the books say that they doesn't work - not true).

The added benefit of suggesting that a pet owner join this support group is that these folks are truly a dedicated bunch, and some "haunt" the site on evenings, holidays and weekends, to answer questions or suggest a visit to the emergency room - when WE are not available. If there are ANY concerns the owner will be encouraged to seek veterinary care immediately.

One of the moderators of the yahoo group, and her husband (Donna and Joe Koch) have designed a feeding chair for dogs with megaesophagus (which they've named the Bailey Chair, after their dog Bailey who is 11 years old, as of 7/09, and was diagnosed as a 3 month old puppy) at: http://www.geocities.com/bailey_chair/

On their website there are dozens of photos of how the dogs are held vertically after feeding (in school and even in recent lectures, I was taught to have the pet stand on a step, with the food bowl raised -

that will not be successful for many pets). Pet owners can obtain a DVD on how to construct a Bailey Chair for their own pet.

FYI, Dr. Diane Shelton, the neurologist at the Comparative Neurology Lab, University of California, San Diego, a megaesophagus website, and photos of the Bailey chair on her website. A fine endorsement, indeed - <http://vetneuromuscular.ucsd.edu/cases/2005/may05.html>

I hope this information proves to be helpful to you and your patient.

Thank you for your consideration,

Dr. Kathy Morris - University of Illinois 1974

Addendum:

7/09

We've posted information on the Veterinary Information Network (VIN) regarding the suggestion to consider that all of these dogs do not have to have a "doom and gloom" prognosis. Some of the internists are now referring to this site and have opened their minds to the potential of a good life for these pets.