SPEAKING FOR SPOT: A REVIEW BY JESSIE BORGMAN PhD

Speaking for Spot: Be the Advocate Your Dog Needs to Live a Happy, Healthy, Longer Life is written by Dr. Nancy Kay, a veterinarian. Dr. Kay is a board-certified internal medicine specialist who has shared her expertise in several textbooks and professional journals. She's a regular on the speaker circuit for both national and regional events, but she's most at home talking about how veterinarians can better connect and communicate with their clients.

In the book, Dr. Kay provides an insider's guide to help owners navigate their dog's health. The theme of her text is medical advocacy guiding humans in helping their dogs (who obviously can't talk) advocate for their health needs. She encourages owners to become "medical advocates" who partner with their veterinarians to make the best health decisions for their dogs. The book provides lots of insider tips on various areas of pet care, including: choosing the right vet, navigating difficult decisions, asking the right questions, communication styles, and common disease and symptoms.

The book is written with a mix of warmth, honesty, and humor. It is clear that Dr. Kay draws on her decades of experience in small animal internal medicine. The book is divided into eleven chapters:

- Medical Advocacy 101
- Medical Decision-Making You and Your Dog Can Live With
- Finding Dr. Wonderful and Your Mutt's Mayo Clinic
- The Office Visit: What You Can Do to Help Your Dog…and Your Vet
- Wow, I Didn't Know You Could Do That on Dogs!
- The Vaccination Conundrum
- Important Questions to Ask Your Vet…and How to Ask Them
- When the Diagnosis is Cancer
- A Second Opinion Is Always Okay
- Money Matters
- Euthanasia: Making the Best of a Difficult Situation

The book also includes two appendices:

- Appendix I: Common Symptoms and Questions Your Vet Will Ask About Them
- Appendix II: Common Diseases and Question You Should Ask Your Vet About Them

The book also has a companion website which offers many additional resources for pet owners, as well as other book reviews, excerpts from the book, a health-related blog (written by Dr. Kay), and much more!

- Speaking for Spot

Strengths

- The main strength of the book is its empowering advocacy approach in which Dr. Kay motivates readers to not be “passive” pet owners but rather “active” medical advocates.
- The tone and clarity of how Dr. Kay explains complex medical technologies and processes is a positive as it comes across more conversational and not patronizing as some vet interactions can be.
- The appendices are very comprehensive and list common symptoms and questions the vet is likely to ask when your pet is ill. The appendices have illustrated anatomical dog images to help readers understand what areas of the dog body are affected for the given illness.
- Dr. Kay does not shy away from discussing two challenging parts of dog ownership, finances and end of life choices. She does so with very clear, compassion, and a frank discussion of what should be considered and how best to handle these two challenging aspects.

Weaknesses

- As the book was written in 2008, information and approaches could be outdated as there have been many advancements in veterinarian medicine and protocol.
- While the book is very visual, sometimes the visuals on the page with the text can be overwhelming and/or distracting.
- In discussing dietary approaches for dogs, Dr. Kay’s dietary approach could indicate a bias toward prescription diets and large-scale pet food manufacturers, which might clash with owners who prefer holistic or organic feeding approaches, especially in more recent years when many dog owners are looking towards fresher food options, such as Just Food for Dogs, Farmer’s Dog, and Fresh Pet.
- As many veterinarian offices have been and are being bought out by private equity firms, some of Dr. Kay’s insider tips may not apply as processes and payments have become corporate driven.

Final Thoughts

On the book’s companion website, Dr. Kay states, “My hope is that this book will help you become a highly effective medical advocate as you navigate the often confusing, overwhelming, and expensive world of veterinary medicine” and the tips and guidance offered in this book will allow you to do just that. This book is for pet owners who consider their dog part of the family. It’s a great resource to help owners avoid the stress of making a panicked or uneducated choice when things with your dog’s health get challenging. *Speaking for Spot: Be the Advocate Your Dog Needs to Live a Happy, Healthy, Longer Life* is a book that pet owners who want to move beyond being just "pet parents" to becoming active medical advocates for their dogs should be considered an essential read. This book helps average pet owners better navigate basic and complex care for their beloved pets. The book does not shy away from addressing tough topics and how to make choices in the best interest of the pet and owner.

References

Kay, Dr. N. (2008). *Speaking for Spot: Be the advocate your dog needs to live a happy, healthy, longer life*. Trafalgar Square Books.

Kay, Dr. N. (2026). *Speaking for Spot: The best healthcare book for you and your dog*

https://www.speakingforspot.com/index.php

Jessie Borgman is a professor who teaches college writing courses online. She had her first Scottie when she was 9 years old and has loved the breed ever since. She lives in the Indianapolis, IN area with her husband and their four Scotties: Luna, Norman, Howard, and Agnes.