

November 29, 2010

Edmund G. Brown, Jr.  
Attorney General's Office  
California Department of Justice Attn: Public Inquiry Unit  
P.O. Box 944255  
Sacramento, CA 94244-2550

Dear Mr. Brown:

I am writing to you regarding a topic of public interest and concern: the treatment and care of our pets by veterinarians and their staff. Specifically, I would like to draw your attention to these veterinary facilities that purport to provide top-notch health care for pets, but in policy and practice do no such thing. Actually, these facilities merely represent themselves as having 24-hour emergency assistance, skillful professionals, and service with care and compassion.

Many of us are pet lovers and enthusiasts, which means that our pets are part of our family. I entrusted the care of Amore, my Bichon Frise to Dr. Stegeman of Southern California Veterinary Specialty Hospital. On their website, the mission statement is explicit: "Your pet is an important member of your family, and we treat each patient as if they are part of ours." Believing in the words of that mission statement, I expected that in exchange for the money paid for Amore's health care we would receive not only exceptional medical service, but round-the-clock emergency care.

Unfortunately, this was not my experience. Amore was diagnosed with Cushing's disease and she was put under the care of Dr. Stegeman, who made promises that she would personally attend to any and all of Amore's needs either by phone or in-person. Dr. Stegeman also promised that even if she was not physically present at the hospital during the weekends or after-hours, the on-duty staff during these times would get a hold of her on the phone in case of any emergency with Amore. To further ease my doubts, Dr. Stegeman assured me that the on-duty weekend and after-hours staff was just as good and qualified as the daytime staff.

When Amore's health drastically declined one night, I brought her to their ER clinic. Rather than a licensed vet on-duty, we were left to the care of "Dr. Chan," who I later found out was a mere intern, representing herself as a licensed vet. In fact, neither the staff nor Ms. Chan informed me that she was not a licensed vet and further, the staff and Ms. Chan acted as though she was actually licensed. As a result, Ms. Chan did not know where to begin with Amore's diagnosis. Numerous times I pleaded to speak directly with Dr. Stegeman, but both the receptionist and Ms. Chan rebuffed my requests. It was later revealed to me that during the moments I pleaded to speak directly with Dr. Stegeman, Ms. Chan and the receptionist had actually talked with the doctor without informing me of such contact. According to Ms. Chan, Dr. Stegeman approved of all her

decisions regarding Amore's health. At the suggestion of Dr. Stegeman, Ms. Chan stated that Amore "looked good enough to go home," but I could either leave her alone at the hospital for Dr. Stegeman the next day or bring her back tomorrow. Not wanting to leave Amore alone in pain at the hospital or with the prospect of having her die there, I brought her home to ease her discomfort. In fact, because I was filled with fear for Amore, I asked Ms. Chan if Amore looked like she was going to die, but Ms. Chan repeated that Amore was good enough to go home. It never crossed my mind that my gut feelings would be confirmed and that in such a short time, Amore would die despite Ms. Chan's assurances. Essentially, in nearly 24-hours, Amore died, convulsing in my husband's arms while bleeding profusely through her nose, eyes, and mouth.

Ms. Chan never called me back to check up on Amore. What truly shows the lack of accountability in this facility is seen in Dr. Stegeman's lack of knowledge about her patients. She called me the next morning exclaiming that Amore must be much better because we missed her morning appointment. She had no idea that Amore had died and when that fact finally became apparent to her, she never again mentioned the possibility of Amore's death due to a negative reaction to Amore's medication. My family and I have not only had to withstand Dr. Stegeman's blame on us for Amore's untimely death, but we have yet to be given an explanation as to how and why Amore died. No dog's life should end the way Amore's did. She was a member of our family and we trusted that Amore was a cared patient of Southern California Veterinary Specialty Hospital. However, these doctors turned their backs away from their critically ill patient and left her to the untrained hands of mere student interns.

While my family still mourns Amore's death, the point of this letter is to alert the public of facilities such as Southern California Veterinary Specialty Hospital, which represent themselves as providing exceptional medical skill, coupled with care and compassion, but ultimately fall short. I urge you to motivate this facility as all those alike, to disclose their true policies and practices: your money pays on-duty interns rather than licensed vets during critical emergency hours.

Sincerely,

Vivivana FaBrizio