Exploratory Laparotomy
Surgery Consent Form

Your veterinarian has determined that your pet is in need of an exploratory laparotomy. We call this procedure an “exploratory” because we are not exactly sure what we are going to find and what might need to be done once we find it. It is also possible that we will not find anything abnormal (negative exploratory). It is difficult to accurately estimate the cost of an exploratory since finding a simple foreign body in the stomach has very different costs than a tumor on the liver or intestine. In human medicine, with insurance covering the cost of many pre-surgical tests, studies like CT and MRI as well as ultrasound can many times accurately diagnose the problem before surgery. In veterinary medicine, it is most often more cost effective, timely, and safer for the patient to just go right to surgery to both diagnose and fix the problem whenever possible. If your pet is very ill or not eating it can take several days to run a myriad of sometimes expensive tests only to end up needing surgery anyway with little added information. We then have spent more money (usually without a third party payer like human medicine) and our pet’s condition has possibly deteriorated making surgery more risky (anesthetic reactions and increased risk of infection and poor wound healing from lack of protein). Only your pet’s veterinarian can determine when and if an exploratory surgery is best for your pet’s condition.

For conditions involving a mass, it is usually not possible to tell by just looking if it is cancer or not unless there is obvious spread to other organs like the liver and spleen. In these situations, surgical removal rarely adds significant time to your pet’s life. The surgeon will sometimes want to call you during surgery to discuss their findings and offer you options along with costs to decide together on the best course of action for your pet. This is why it is important that someone who is authorized to make decisions be available during the surgery by phone whenever possible.

In conditions like chronic vomiting or not eating, or an abnormal radiograph or ultrasound, sometimes the surgery fails to find an obvious cause of your pet’s condition. In many cases, multiple biopsies will be taken of appropriate organs and tissues and sent to a pathologist to look at the specimens under a microscope. This process can take 3-5 business days which can, at times, be frustrating if your pet is ill.

A very wise and experienced surgeon once said that “if you are not doing one or two negative exploratories a year on your patients, then you are not doing enough exploratories.” Exploratory laparotomy is a tool just like a blood test or a radiograph to help diagnose frustrating and challenging illnesses that do not show up on blood tests or radiographs (swallowing a sock for instance in a dog or sewing string in a cat) as well as a more cost effective way to examine tumors or swellings inside the abdomen to determine if they are surgically removable and get a biopsy to determine if they are cancer. If your pet’s exploratory surgery does not find any obvious abnormalities, it is not considered a negative exploratory until the biopsy results (if taken) come back. A vomiting and diarrhea patient that is not eating may have not obvious conditions seen at surgery but the biopsy could show severe infiltrative bowel disease due to food allergies. A liver tumor may not be fully removable but the biopsy may show it is benign hepatoma (not cancer) and
not affect your pet’s lifespan. If you have any questions about the need for an exploratory or what the surgery entails, please talk to your veterinarian or the surgeon can call you before surgery to answer all your questions.

The undersigned owner or authorized agent of admitted patient __________________________ hereby authorize the admitting veterinarian (and his/her designated associates or assistants) to administer such treatment as is necessary to perform the below-mentioned procedure. The nature of the procedure(s) has been explained to me and no guarantee has been made as to results or cure. I understand that there may be risk involved in these procedures.

I consent to the administration of such anesthetics or tranquilizers as are necessary.

Anesthetic Risks: (Although every effort is made to make anesthesia as safe as possible including vital sign monitoring and use of the most up to date anesthetic agents and equipment, I understand that anesthesia carries inherent risks) The incidence of complications from anesthesia are extremely low and we do not anticipate any complications in your pet but on rare occasions the following can occur:

1. Allergic reaction to the anesthetic agents
2. Heart rhythm abnormalities
3. Untoward reactions to the gas including drops in blood pressure or respiratory difficulties
4. Just like in humans, on very rare occasions, general anesthesia can result in death.

*We are prepared and will treat any anesthetic reactions if they occur, but general anesthesia is never completely without risk.*

Procedure: Exploratory Laparotomy; Possible Epidural and Tissue Biopsies; Additional procedures may be necessary based on findings.

Surgical Risks:

1. Infection (less than 3%) which may require additional testing and medication at an additional cost.
2. Hemorrhage (during or after surgery) that may require a transfusion at additional cost
3. Wound dehiscence internally, in the abdominal wall, or the skin especially if your pet has not eaten for many days or is overactive after surgery
4. Pancreatitis
5. Peritonitis (infection in the abdomen)
6. Inoperable conditions are sometimes found

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<th>Date</th>
<th>Pet Owner/Agent Signature</th>
<th>Phone I Can Be Reached At Today</th>
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*Client Information Series # 176*
AT ALL TIMES