

KAIA'S STORY:

Kaia is our sweet 8 year old sheltie who we have had since she was 3 months old. She was trained with my special needs daughter to be her service dog, specifically to respond to her daily seizures. My daughter's seizures are triggered by touching her right hand, therefore, Kaia has been trained to be on the right side of my daughter, Makena when we are out in the community, Kaia remains on the right side of her wheelchair which acts as a buffer so people don't come up and automatically grab my daughter's right hand.

About 3 years ago Kaia began having some skin allergies. So we started looking into all the possibilities with changing food, allergy medications, etc. The vet then decided to check Kaia for Cushing's disease as she exhibited some of the signs of this disorder. We did blood work, and an abdominal ultrasound. She confused us all, as her labs seemed fine, but her gallbladder seemed to be abnormal from the views of the ultrasound. The vet decided to put her on medication to control her gallbladder. She indicated that she appeared to have a mucous seal, which makes the bile in the gallbladder "sludgy". Dr. Wade put her on two types of medications to keep her gallbladder in check and stated that we would follow Kaia with blood work and annual ultrasounds to follow Kaia and make sure she remained stable.

With each ultrasound and labs, Kaia appeared to be remaining stable with no change. That is, until this April. We took her in for her annual ultrasound and well-check and didn't really think anything of it, as it had become a routine at this point. The news we received next, we were not prepared for. The doctor informed us that Kaia's gallbladder was dangerously enlarged and at high risk for rupture. She indicated that she needed it to be removed within the next 48 hours to give Kaia the best chance at survival. "How could this be", I asked her. Kaia is feeling the best she's felt as her allergies are finally under control, she's eating, playing and not acting in any kind of distress. Her primary vet sent us over to consult with a surgeon who stated, that he didn't feel right going in to perform surgery on this dog who was totally asymptomatic. I agreed, and he recommended we have his gastroenterologist take another look at her to confirm her primary vet's opinion and findings. I agreed. Dr. Stegeman called me back and stated that her gallbladder was very diseased and needed to come out, but they also found an

adrenal mass as well. She kept her for further testing to find out what type of mass we might be dealing with. I agreed to do that.

When I received the estimate for Kaia's surgery and needs, I about flipped. They were estimating that Kaia's surgery costs/needs would be upwards of \$6,000 (without complications). I'm a single mom of a severely special needs child and am unable to work as I am a full-time caretaker to my daughter. How am I going to afford this? We almost lost my daughter, three times last summer, and was in the hospital for over 3 weeks. Now Kaia? Kaia was instrumental in helping my daughter Makena fight for her life last summer, we just can't lose her now! Kaia is too valuable to our family and too young to even consider putting her down. It would also be unfair to expect her to go on with the risk of her gallbladder rupturing and the pain it would cause if this were to happen. I had to find a way to get Kaia the help she needed.

That night, I started searching for every organization that would help with situations like this. I started reaching out to every one of them and frantically filling out applications with the hope that they would be able to help us in some way. At the same time, the hospital that we were working with was very unwilling to help with securing donations, not to mention they would not schedule Kaia's surgery until I had at least \$6,000 up front to provide to them. This was absurd, so I called Kaia's primary vet back and asked for another recommendation. They referred us to Dr. Tony Cambridge at Veterinary Surgery Specialists in Tustin, CA. We met with him and came up with a plan for Kaia's surgery. We scheduled her surgery for April 29, 2015. The staff at this hospital helped fill out any applications we still needed in order to secure any more donations for Kaia's surgery. We received a call from Marnie at VSS stating that we had received enough grants that they were not going to collect a deposit from us the day of surgery, that she was covered! What an absolute blessing and relief. I could now focus on Kaia and her surgery and recovery.

Kaia made it through surgery and appeared to be doing fine until early the next morning. Dr. Cambridge called me and stated that her vitals were dropping and he was very concerned and may need to go back in. Kaia was retaining fluid in her belly and he was concerned that something had twisted and was creating the excess fluids. Dr. Cambridge decided not to do the surgery as he was concerned he might lose her on the table as her blood pressure was dangerously low. He felt

at this time, that to give Kaia the best possible chance at survival that she needed to be admitted to the critical care unit. This was still under the same roof, but was a different staff, and would be under a different financial responsibility. As you can imagine, I was just completely distraught! I was not prepared for this, and now this meant that I needed to do more fundraising and contacting organizations I had not contacted yet in order to now get her critical care needs covered. They estimated that her care would cost between \$3,500 and \$5,500 depending on what she needed. After talking with Steve and Dorian over at the ADV Internal Medicine (Critical Care Unit) they generously agreed to give us a 25% discount as a service dog discount. They also stated that they didn't have a billing department to invoice all of the organizations, but that if I was willing to help them to help me, they would allow me to be the go between to collect on Kaia's behalf so that I was not out the additional monies. I was completely blown away by their willingness to work with me and help Kaia at the same time.

It was really touch and go with Kaia up until Thursday night when she finally started to stabilize. She continues to do well. In fact, I just received a phone call this morning from Dr. Chung in the critical care unit that she was going to release Kaia today at noon, but wanted me to bring her back tomorrow for more blood work to keep an eye on her bilirubin that is still increased. Steve and Dorian have again generously agreed to allow me to bring Kaia home today (Saturday, May 2, 2015) with the promise that I would work on getting the donations and grants to pay Kaia's medical bill off within the next 60 days. At this time, Kaia's remaining balance is approximately \$3,000.

We are still trying to collect donations on Kaia's behalf to make good on our promise to pay off her balance owed to the critical care unit within 60 days. Any help you could provide would be greatly appreciated. Paws 4 a Cure has generously donated what they can to help offset our costs and has agreed to publicize our story so that we could hopefully generate more donations for Kaia's fund.

Thank you from the bottom of our hearts for your consideration and support for our family. Words cannot begin to express how truly grateful we are for all your donations.

With much thanks,

Tiffany, Makena & Kaia