



Euthanasia

Crossing the Rainbow Bridge



What is euthanasia?

“The act of inducing humane death in an animal. It is our responsibility as veterinarians and human beings to ensure that if an animal’s life is to be taken, it is done with the highest degree of respect, and with an emphasis on making the death as painless and distress-free as possible.” - AVMA

From the Greek:

“eu” - meaning good or true

“thanatos” - meaning death



Reasons For Euthanasia

1 | Disease, Illness, Pain/Suffering, QOL

- Incurable or untreatable diseases or conditions
- Poor/grave prognosis
- Unmanageable pain
- Deteriorating quality of life

2 | Behavioral

- Aggression
- Dangerous
- Public safety
- Not for nuisance behaviors

3 | Financial

- Exorbitant surgical costs
- Expensive treatment of a condition (immediate or ongoing)

Disease, Illness, Pain/Suffering, Quality of Life (QOL)



- Cancer
- End-stage disease or organ failure
- Saddle thrombus
- Irreparable fractures, severe trauma
- Age is not a disease
 - But may be a factor - ex: GDV in 12 year old Dane, etc.
- Can be the kindest treatment to end suffering
- Quality of Life Evaluation

Quality of Life

QUALITY OF LIFE SCALE

(The H5M2 Scale)

WHEN SHOULD I PUT MY DOG DOWN?

The QoL scale, created by Alice Villalobos, will help pet caregivers decide whether to continue their pet's end of life care. Bring this to your vet to talk about your pet's quality of life and discuss ways to improve your pet's score if needed. A score of 0 is poor quality of life, and a score of 10 indicates an ideal quality of life.

QOL Factor	Score 0-10 (10 is ideal)	Description
HURT	<input type="text"/>	Adequate pain control and breathing ability are of top concern. If your dog can't breathe properly, nothing else matters. Can you provide oxygen supplementation if necessary? Is their breathing labored? Is your dog's pain well-managed?
HUNGER	<input type="text"/>	Is your dog able to eat enough nutritious food? Are you able to hand-feed if needed? Does your dog need a feeding tube? Are you able to blend food when necessary and find foods that are nutritious that they will eat?
HYDRATION	<input type="text"/>	Is your dog dehydrated (skin slowly retracts after being pinched)? Is your dog drinking enough (10 ml per pound per day)? Are you willing to administer subcutaneous fluids if needed?
HYGIENE	<input type="text"/>	Are you able to perform proper grooming for your pet? (brushing, cleaning after eliminations, keeping them free of parasites, cleaning the coat and wounds)

HAPPINESS

Does your dog express joy and interest?
Is your pet responsive to family, toys, etc.?
Is your dog depressed, lonely, anxious, bored or afraid?
Can your dog's bed be moved to be close to family activities?
Do you provide routine fun time that the pet enjoys?

MOBILITY

Does your dog feel like going for a walk? Is your pet having seizures or stumbling?
Can your dog get up without assistance?
Can you provide mechanical help (e.g., a cart) if needed?
Are you willing to move your pet to different locations and change their position at least every two hours if they are immobile? (must provide soft bedding)
Note: Some caregivers feel that euthanasia is preferable to amputation, but an animal with limited mobility who is still alert and responsive can have a good quality of life as long as the family is committed to helping their dog.

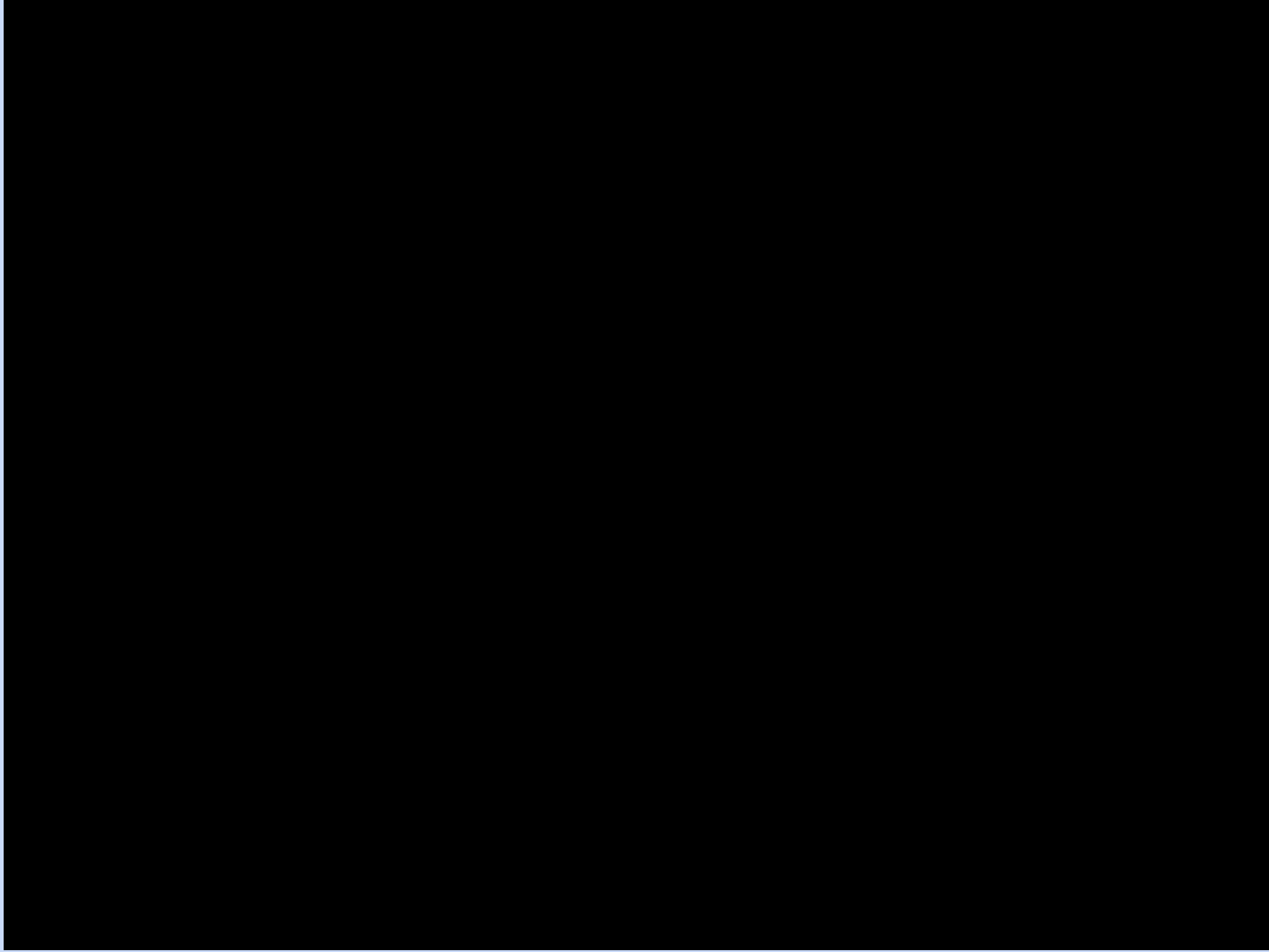
MORE GOOD DAYS THAN BAD

Are there more "bad" days, where the pet seems to be "turned off" to life?
Do more days include things like vomiting, nausea, diarrhea, frustration, falling down, seizures, etc.?
When bad days outnumber good days, the quality of life might be too compromised. When a healthy human-animal bond is no longer possible, the end is near. The decision for euthanasia needs to be made if your dog is suffering. It is ideal when a dog's passing comes peacefully and painlessly.

TOTAL

*A total over 35 points represents acceptable life quality to continue with dog hospice. A total of 70 is a perfect score.

What Dreams May Come



Behavioral



Maryland Code has a “strict liability” rule (vs. “The One Bite” Rule)

- An owner is responsible for all damages caused while a dog is running at large, even if the owner (a) did not know the dog would act aggressively *and* (b) even if the owner took reasonable care to prevent the dog from causing injuries.
 - Exceptions: (1) when provoked, (2) if attacking a trespasser/burglar, (3) if attacking someone committing a criminal offense against any person (murder, rape, assault)

“Dangerous dog”

- A dog that “without provocation has killed or inflicted severe injury on a person” or was classified as a “potentially dangerous dog”, then bit a person, injured or killed an animal off its owner’s property, or attacked without provocation.
- “Dangerous dogs” must be kept on property or must be muzzled and restrained when off the property (misdemeanor penalty for not complying).

There is no BSL (Breed-Specific Legislation) in MD as of 2012 about “inherently dangerous dogs”

- Previous ruling that Pit Bulls, Rottweilers, etc. were “inherently dangerous”

Financial

These can be more difficult situations.



We DO try to work with owners for a favorable outcome and try to offer as many alternatives as possible. Our ultimate goal is always a happy, healthy pet and owner.

Alternatives

- Aggressive versus conservative treatment
- Financial options
 - ScratchPay - short term installment loan (\$35-\$10,000)
 - Care Credit - credit card (\$200-\$25,000)
- Other clinics - SpayNow (less expensive)

Financial

	2021 AAVEC*	Spay Now
Dog Spay	400	100-220
Dog Neuter	325	85-200
Cat Spay	300	65
Cat Neuter	250	55
Amputation (leg)		550-1200
Cystotomy	4700-6100	400-1375
Exploratory	3600-6300	755-1200
Enucleation	2000-2400	375-475
Foreign Body	2600-6300	755-1200
GDV	3600-5700	
GDV w/ Gastropexy	5000-7000	
Gastropexy		650
Growth/Mass Removal	2000-2400	225-1200
Perineal Urethrostomy (cat)	900	925
Wound/Laceration Repair	1000-1900	125-600



*AAVEC prices do not include any drugs or hospitalization fees.

Specialty services treatments are likely even more expensive

- CVSS
- CVNI

These are not necessarily euthanasia-worthy procedures, but just a representation of the very real and high costs of veterinary care.

Financial

DO NOT JUDGE THESE OWNERS.



- It is easy to say
 - “They shouldn’t have a pet if they can’t afford it.”
 - “I would do everything I could to pay that cost.”
 - “Price shouldn’t matter - it is their pet!”
- Most are devastated that they are unable to make the financial commitment required to treat or save their pet, and this decision is not made lightly.
 - There are a small number of owners that truly only think of pets as “just animals” or “property” (legal definition)
- Do not say you will “save the pet” because you CAN afford it with your discount - that won’t apply to pets in these cases.

How do we get to
that decision?



Conversation with Owners



This is an unfortunately frequent conversation our DVMs have with owners.

- Honesty and integrity answering questions
- “If this was your pet...”
- Providing other options
 - Financial support
 - ScratchPay, Care Credit
 - Lower-cost options
 - Spay Now, other clinics
 - Potential for relinquishing pet to shelter*
- **EMPATHY** - this is not an easy topic to navigate

Consent



Because of the final, irreversible result of this decision, we want to be very clear about an owner's decision and that they understand the situation.

- Paperwork to sign authorizing euthanasia
- Phone consent
 - Owner unable to be present or sign paperwork
 - Two-person verification system

What happens
before euthanasia is
performed?



Preparing the Room and the Pet (Owner Present)

- Ensure location is available (CST usually will do this, but double-check)
 - Grief Room/Room 19
 - Soft, warm lighting, water feature, comfortable seating, O2 line
 - COVID protocol - masks are required, only two people present
 - Alternative Locations (*rare circumstances)
 - Outside, in the grass, at the gazebo
 - In a client's car
- Place an IV catheter ("IVC-E", euthanasia IV)
 - Add an extension set for *some* social distancing
 - Draw up drugs for doctor
 - Propofol, Euthanasia solution
 - Euthanasia solution is VISCOUS - dilute with NaCl or H2O
 - Don't forget a flush (ensure enough volume)

Delivering the Pet to the Owner



- Once IVC is in place, move the pet to a gurney with soft blankets/bedding
 - Some owners may provide their own blanket or toy
 - Be sure to gather all personal belongings (owners don't want to be called afterwards regarding a carrier, blanket, or collar that was left at the hospital)
 - If a cat is being taken outside for euthanasia- secure them with a leash/harness or carrier*
- Take pet to Room 19
 - Introduce yourself
 - Acknowledge their loss
 - Choose your words thoughtfully, but not evasively
 - Don't say "death", "die", "body", etc.
 - Refer to their pet by name
 - Ask if they would like to spend some time with their pet before the doctor comes in
 - Usually they only want a few minutes (5 minutes seem like a very long time, yet never enough)
 - Let *them* determine how they want to take this last journey together with their pet
 - Answer any questions they have (usually not many)
- Be sure to communicate time frame to doctor so an owner is not left waiting

How to Behave & What to Expect



This is a terrible day for an owner, no matter the circumstances. They may have been aggressively managing chronic, end stage kidney disease in their geriatric cat for months and now QOL is not satisfactory, or their new puppy may have gotten out and they watched as a car hit him and broke his back.

Be sensitive. Be calm. Be empathetic. Be respectful. Be honest.*

Possible owner reactions:

Shock/disbelief, fear, anger, guilt, frustration, sadness, despair, screaming, crying, confusion.

Grief is a very personal thing, and there is not a right or wrong way to experience it.

Grief – Five Emotional Stages



- Denial - “This can’t be happening.”
- Anger - Why is this happening? Who is to blame?
- Bargaining - Make this not happen, and in return I will____.
- Depression - Sadness, understanding the loss and its aftermath.
- Acceptance - I am at peace with what happened.

The stages “were never meant to help tuck messy emotions into neat packages.... Our grieving is as individual as our lives.”

- Elizabeth Kübler-Ross

Euthanasia Without Owner(s) Present

- Just like grief is very personal, so is the decision for an owner to be with their pet or not during the euthanasia process.
- Most do choose to be with their pet.
 - Many owners who were not with a pet for euthanasia later regretted that decision.
- Some are unable due to emotional state or physical location.
- In these situations, doctor will usually ask a technician or assistant for help after getting euthanasia consent from the owner.
 - May place an IVC, but more likely just a butterfly catheter for injections.
 - Hold and comfort pet during process.
 - If you are uncomfortable doing this, communicate it to the doctor or your Shift Lead and someone will step in for you.

Physical and Chemical Processes



Two-injection method is the preferred standard in veterinary practice.

#1 - Profound sedation to complete anesthesia

- Propofol - IV only
- Telazol - IV, IM
- Ketamine/Valium - IV, IM

The pet will not be responsive after this injection

#2 - Cessation of body system functions

- Beuthanasia-D solution
 - Sodium pentobarbital
 - Anesthesia, rapid unconsciousness
 - Phenytoin
 - Decreased CNS function, cardiovascular collapse

Barbiturate class – sedative-hypnotic drugs that depress central nervous system, causing:

- Cessation of brain function
- Respiratory arrest
- Cardiac arrest

Euthanasia Action Time*

Route	Action Time	Pros	Cons
IV (intravenous)	5-10s for loss of consciousness 40s for death	Rapid action Smallest solution volume required	Potentially difficult vein access
IR (intrarenal)	<30s for Resp/Cardiac arrest <60s for death	Easier than venous access	Challenging target organ Improper positioning prolongs death (~15min) Larger volume of solution required
IH (intrahepatic)	2 min		Inadequate penetration prolongs death (10min)
IP (intraperitoneal)	6-8 min	Easy injection target	Requires large solution volume Health factors can slow absorption
IC (intracardiac)	Immediate	Easier target organ Immediate result	Can be disturbing for owner/caretaker

*Values are from a feline veterinary source

Physical and Chemical Processes

What happens to the body after euthanasia?

- **Agonal breaths** - a reflex, or spasm of the diaphragm (can be alarming to watch)
- **Muscle twitches** - leftover nerves firing as cells die, involuntary movements
- Eyes may or may not close
- Urination/Defecation - muscle relaxation, no control over bladder or sphincters
- CHF - patients often have bloody discharge from nose/mouth

Confirmation of death is performed by auscultation of the heart.

What happens afterwards?



Aftercare



- **Private** cremation
- **Group** cremation
- **Home** burial
 - Sometimes an owner can't decide in the moment - we will HOLD a body
- Agape Pet Services - cremation service
 - www.agapepetservices.com
 - Paw print, nose print, fur clipping
 - Glass art, glass beads/jewelry, portraits, keychains
 - Online memorials
- Pick up service - 3 days per week
- Careful tracking of tags and paperwork to avoid any mix ups or errors
 - This is one of the responsibilities of the assistants

Support

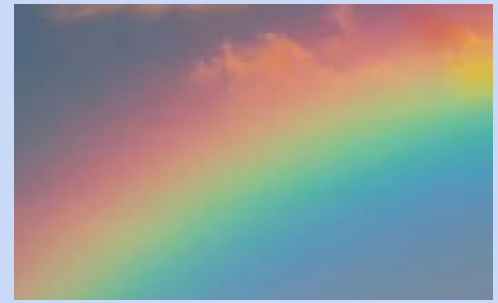
- Rainbow Bridge
- Pet Loss Groups
- Handouts and literature for clients



“Our animal friends teach us more than we could have expected and love us more than we could have hoped... that’s why we miss them more than we could have imagined.”

-Anonymous

Rainbow Bridge



Just this side of heaven is a place called Rainbow Bridge.

When an animal dies that has been especially close to someone here, that pet goes to Rainbow Bridge. There are meadows and hills for all of our special friends so they can run and play together. There is plenty of food, water and sunshine, and our friends are warm and comfortable.

All the animals who had been ill and old are restored to health and vigor. Those who were hurt or maimed are made whole and strong again, just as we remember them in our dreams of days and times gone by. The animals are happy and content, except for one small thing; they each miss someone very special to them, who had to be left behind.

They all run and play together, but the day comes when one suddenly stops and looks into the distance. His bright eyes are intent. His eager body quivers. Suddenly he begins to run from the group, flying over the green grass, his legs carrying him faster and faster.

You have been spotted, and when you and your special friend finally meet, you cling together in joyous reunion, never to be parted again. The happy kisses rain upon your face; your hands again caress the beloved head, and you look once more into the trusting eyes of your pet, so long gone from your life but never absent from your heart.

Then you cross Rainbow Bridge together....

- Author unknown

Cat Tax: Little and Socks



2004 - 2020