The last visit:
Practical considerations for peaceful euthanasia in veterinary practice
Overview

• What is euthanasia
• Mechanics of euthanasia
• Role of veterinary social workers
“Eu” = good  “thanatos” = death


creating and maintaining these Guidelines, the AVMA hopes to ensure that when a veterinarian or other professional intentionally kills an animal under his or her charge, it is done with respect for the interests of the animal and that the process is as humane as possible (ie, that it minimizes pain and distress to the animal and that death occurs as rapidly as possible).
The situation

- Hysterical client
- Veterinarian lacking confidence
- No social worker
Building the comfort room

Aesthetics:
- Home furniture
- Temperature controlled
- Soothing colors
- Colorful, soothing wall hangings
- Dim, non-fluorescent lighting
- Options for music
- Plants or greenery
- Contributed pet memorials

Practical:
- Blinds/curtains
- Do not disturb sign
- Easily cleanable
- Paging system/telephone
- Located with quick exit
- Located in quiet area
- Enough room and wide enough walkway
Building the comfort room

For patient:
- Blankets/towels/mats
- Diaper pads
- Grip surfaces
- Oxygen hook-up
- Hydraulic table
- Bowls, treats
- Pheromone plugs

For client:
- Comfortable seating
- Tissues
- Sink
- Mirror
- Telephone
- Water
- Pet loss support books/resources
Present or not present

- Ask if ever witnessed euthanasia before
- Invite to be present
  - Closure
  - Witness peace and tranquility
  - Last moments with family instead of strangers
- “Offering the family options, such as to be present during the euthanasia, makes the veterinarian's task easier and helps clients cope.” Cohen, 1991
Present or not present

Presence of owners

Owners were present at the destruction of their animals on 317 occasions (19.7 per cent) in August/September and 266 (18.5 per cent) in December/January. There was a range for individual practices of between 0 and 82 per cent; it was obvious that some practices encouraged owners to remain with their pets, while others actively discouraged them. Stead, 1982

• Majority of clients were present during the process (Dickinson 2011)
Paint the picture: What to expect

- Complete paperwork and payment beforehand
- Sedation
- IV catheter
- Spend time before and after
- The injections
- Possible effects
- Confirmation of death
- Aftercare
Sedation

• **Pros:**
  - Minimizes fear and anxiety
  - Allows for closeness before death
  - Minimizes restraint during euthanasia
  - Relieves pain before death

• **Cons:**
  - May lead to physical distress
  - Over-sedation
  - Vomiting
  - Greater expense
Practical sedation

• Injectable
  • Acepromazine + Butorphanol
  • Midazolam + Butorphanol

• Oral
  • Telazol + acepromazine

• Dormosedan (detomidine)
  • 0.35 mg/m²
Place IV catheter

- MUST for present euthanasia
- Place away from head
- Consider white vetwrap
Injections

- Saline
- Propofol: 6 mg/kg
- Euthanasia solution: 1 mL/10 lb
  - Beuthanasia/Euthasol (pink)
  - Fatal plus (blue)
Injection 1: Saline

- Flush
Injection 2: Propofol

- Go slow
Injection 3: Euthanasia solution

- “Is it okay” not “Are you ready?”
- Go fast, can be diluted with saline
- Cover the color with hand
Potential effects

• Gasp/Sigh
• Vocalization
• Urination/defecation
• Involuntary movement/muscle twitching
• Eyes do not close
Confirmation of death
Confirmation of death

Death must be confirmed before disposal of any animal remains. A combination of criteria is most reliable in confirming death, including lack of pulse, breathing, corneal reflex and response to firm toe pinch, inability to hear respiratory sounds and heartbeat by use of a stethoscope, graying of the mucous membranes, and rigor mortis. None of these signs alone, except rigor mortis, confirms death.
Memorialize
Memorialize

- Collars/leashes/tags
- Fur clippings
- Ink paw print
Options for remains

- Take home
- Cremation
  - Group
  - Private
- Cemetery
- Freeze dry
Options for remains

- Jewelry
Follow-up

• Sympathy card
• Call
Client satisfaction

- 92% highly satisfied (Fernandez-Mehler, 2013)
- Factors
  - Compassionate and caring attitude of hospital employees
  - Option for client to be present
  - Client being informed and prepared
  - Privacy (Martin, 2004)
- 14% of clients changed veterinarian after euthanasia of a pet (Fernandez-Mehler, 2013)
Hospice and Euthanasia Services

IAAHPC
International Association of Animal Hospice and Palliative Care

Home to Heaven
In-Home Pet Hospice and Euthanasia Services
Dr. Kathleen Cooney, DVM (970) 412-6212

Pet Loss At Home
Private Pet Euthanasia in the Comfort of Home
(877) 219-4811
www.PetLossAtHome.com

Lap of Love
Veterinary Hospice & In-Home Euthanasia
www.LapOfLove.com
Social worker

- To be present
- To listen
- To acknowledge client’s needs
- To facilitate questions
- To facilitate discussion with children and other family members
- To educate on euthanasia process
- To provide support resources
- Most veterinary practices do not have a grief counselor on site (Dickinson 2011)
Indications for social worker to intervene

- Client who is going to have a tough time
  - Unstable
  - Angry
  - 50% of owners feel guilty about euthanasia (Adams, 2000)
- Veterinarian who does not have time
- Veterinarian who is not confident/comfortable
*But, there is a balance*

- Ask for permission for social worker to be involved in any part of the process
Pet loss support services
Staff training

• If veterinarians and their staff are uninformed of the benefits of the HAB and the consequences of pet loss, social workers can provide training about the significant influence pets have on clients’ mental health, the importance of grieving, the difference between typical grief and complicated grief, and methods of referral. (Toray, 2004; Stallones, 1994)

• Compassion fatigue
Research

- What factors provide greatest satisfaction?
  - Room/facilities
  - Most comforting words/language
  - Gender differences
  - Procedures
- Effect of presence of social worker on euthanasia experience?
- Effect of pet loss support on grieving?
- Impact on attitudes towards future euthanasias?
- Impact on veterinary care for other animals?
Challenges to research

- Highly emotional state
- Subjective self-report
- Difficult follow-up
- Difficult case control
- Randomization
Veterinarian's Oath

Being admitted to the profession of veterinary medicine, I solemnly swear to use my scientific knowledge and skills for the benefit of society through the protection of animal health, the relief of animal suffering, the conservation of animal resources, the promotion of public health, and the advancement of medical knowledge. I will practice my profession conscientiously, with dignity, and in keeping with the principles of veterinary medical ethics. I accept as a lifelong obligation the continual improvement of my professional knowledge and competence.

...the relief of animal suffering...
Questions