

THE PALLIATIVE CARE EXPERIENCE

Facing the end of a beloved pet's life is probably the most difficult aspect of living with a companion animal. They are the children that rarely outlive us.

Following the shock of diagnosis are decisions to be made about treatment options, including at-home nursing care. It is Hope Vet's experience that as long as there is good quality of life, a pet's life does not need to end immediately but instead can be enhanced with palliative care interventions. The word "palliative" means "to comfort not to cure." It is central to the hospice movement's philosophy of providing treatments aimed at extending life with a maximum of quality and a minimum of discomfort.

The experience of end-of-life care has been described as being one of the most intense experiences of an individual's life. Myriad feelings arise, combined with pragmatic tasks that must be performed. Both feelings and tasks can be affected by environmental factors including people, other pets and external responsibilities and events. Then follows the hardest decision of all—deciding when it is time to put a beloved pet to sleep.

The Hope Vet Palliative Care and End of life Support Group aims to provide a supportive, informative and nurturing environment in which animal caregivers and those who have recently lost a pet can explore feelings and concerns and share experiences with one another. It is hoped that participants will enhance their coping strategies to enable them to make this time a more positive and rewarding experience.

"We must accept finite disappointment but we must never lose Infinite Hope" —MLK

COMMON SUPPORT GROUP TOPICS

QUALITY OF LIFE ASSESSMENTS

During the last months and weeks of a pet's life, quality of life assessments become tremendously important. Factors determining quality of life are different for every animal and for every human making the determination. Concurrent feelings of guilt often arise as people begin to question whether or not they are keeping their beloved pet alive to satisfy their own needs. Talking through the quality of life determinations and making decisions with people who have similar experiences is helpful, comforting and makes a time that is so fraught with worry feel a little less isolating.

NURSING CARE

The palliative care period can be extraordinarily time consuming, and for some people even life consuming. Monitoring and responding to a pet's medical condition becomes increasingly absorbing, as does every observation of every intake and output, every unusual behavior. People often express feeling as though this is swallowing up their life, with the rest of life being somehow put on hold. Support group participants are encouraged to realize that what is absolutely right is taking time to pamper their pet, to have as much fun as possible, to find as much nurturing as possible, all the while observing changes in the pet's behavior and medical condition.

SUPPORT SYSTEMS

Relationships with other humans can be sources of support or stress, or both. Family members and friends tend to sort themselves into two groups—those who will lend unending support of an emotional or practical nature, and those who for

many reasons cannot provide support, or question decisions to nurse or not to nurse.

The group can discuss its member's needs for support, how much to reveal to people, how to help children, and how to cope with friends or family that cannot be supportive.

INSIGHTS

The end-of-life experience has been described by almost all who have gone through it as one that is deeply moving, sometimes life-changing. For some it is a time of personal reflection, for others a realization that their life has been changed by their relationship with their pet and by this time of deep caring and bonding.

The group can help to explore participant's experiences and insights into this period and discuss ways that Individuals can incorporate this experience into their future lives and relationships.

THE ENDING

An individual's feelings about the passing of their pet will be largely determined by a range of factors, including prior experiences and belief systems. A number of worries often accompany this time, which may be exacerbated by difficulties expressing feelings to friends and relatives. These concerns may include fears of euthanasia or death, and uncertainties about resuming one's life after the pet's eventual passing.

If the pet has already died, people are often worried that they made wrong decisions during the course of treatment or in deciding to put their animal companion to sleep at the time that they did.

The group provides a safe forum for individuals to explore and express their feelings, and to experience their pet's passing as ably as possible.

GROUP GROUND RULES

- The group meets on Thursdays, 7:00 PM *sharp*
- The group must begin and end on time
- The group will provide a chance for everyone to speak
- The group will allow people to be quiet and listen if they are not ready to share
- The group participants must be respectful of different opinions and coping styles
- Honesty is valued but statements should be presented in a positive manner
- Confidentiality. What is shared in the group should not be discussed with others outside of the group sessions

GROUP COSTS

Although there is no charge for the group, you are encouraged to donate what you are able to give. The facilitators volunteer their time, therefore all monies are used to further Infinite Hope's programs to promote and support the human-animal bond. Further Information can be found on the Infinite Hope web site at www.Infinite-hope.org.



THE HOPE VET HOSPICE PROGRAM

Hope Vet is one of the few veterinary clinics in the United States to offer dedicated services for terminally ill pets. Hope Vet believes that a pet's life can continue for as long as there is good quality of life for both the pet and his or her human family. Therefore a terminal diagnosis does not have to signify the immediate end of a pet's life, but rather a period of time to say goodbye and a time to prepare for life without one's beloved pet.

Some of the specific palliative care treatments utilized by Hope Vet doctors include:

- Pain relieving medication
- Subcutaneous fluids
- Anti-nausea medication.
- Steroids to decrease inflammation and increase appetite
- Nutritional assessment and recommendations
- Acupuncture
- Massage therapy and acupressure

Hope Vet is a participating practice of the Nikki Hospice Foundation for Pets www.petshospice.org

HOPE



VETERINARY CLINIC

PALLIATIVE CARE AND END OF LIFE SUPPORT GROUP

THURSDAYS 7:00 PM

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