

## Why is it important to distinguish the term “Hospice” from other types of End-of-Life Care?

*“If you carry someone else’s fears and live by someone else’s values, you may find you have lived their lives.”*

*Rachel Naomi Remen, MD*

1. Distinction is important because hospice is a term already familiar to most people in its meaning of giving comfort care to the dying until they pass in their own time, while seeking to neither postpone nor hasten death.
2. Distinction is important so that **hospice IS an available choice** in animal care, and well matching veterinary support can be located. It is difficult enough to find veterinary practitioners to serve such needs, it is close to impossible to locate them when practitioners claim they are offering hospice when they are not in alignment with the basic goals of hospice. Animal owners deserve to know ahead of the time whether their veterinarian is willing **and** experienced in supporting their animal all the way through a passing its own time, if that is feasible to accomplish under their individual circumstances.
3. Distinction is important so that families electing hospice do not have to experience being viewed as inhumane for aiming to give a similar level of care to their animal family member as they would to a human one, nor that such caregivers are given the suggestion to add up numbers to determine the value of the remaining life of their animal loved one.
4. Distinction is important so animals and their families do not feel **rejected by their veterinarians if a euthanasia suggestion is declined** by the family. At a time when many animal owners relate to their animals as sentient beings and are willing to provide ever-increasing comfort care, it no longer suffices to interpret taking a life as the only way to fulfill on the veterinary oath to prevent suffering when it comes to end-of-life challenges.
5. Distinction is important so that animals can **continue to receive veterinary care** all the way to their passing. It is a blind spot of many in the veterinary profession to think suffering of animals can be prevented by taking a strong stand for euthanasia. When such suggestion does not, or not yet, resonate with caregivers as the right time to have their animal’s life end, they may feel their only option is to try to do the best they can without further veterinary support.
6. Distinction is important so that interested families can **learn in a non-threatening manner about the process of dying**, and how to support their animal through the end of life. It is unethical to coerce animal caregivers into euthanizing by painting a dark picture of possible disease progression without neutrally discussing in which ways suffering of the animal can be prevented without taking it’s life, and also treated if those symptoms indeed occur.
7. Distinction is important so that the **spiritual beliefs** of animal caregivers are **respected**. Hospice care honors spiritual perspectives of the family, whether they are of religious nature or not. Going through an end-of-life experience often brings up a spiritual query even in people who do not otherwise concern themselves with such matters. In hospice care, it is essential that valuing spiritual perspectives is not limited to a spiritual counselor, but is also observed by all veterinary staff members in contact with the family.
8. Distinction is important so that **veterinarians have a choice** in what ways they wish to offer end-of-life care, without having to fear to be judged as sub standard and unethical when they support animals passing without euthanasia. Veterinary students too **deserve to learn** about all end-of-life care options.
9. Distinction is important so that the veterinary profession will **expand its body of knowledge** to include how to care for dying patients. The standard level of veterinary knowledge about palliative care has often proven to be insufficient to provide hospice services. The routine use of euthanasia has severely hampered progress in animal end of life care.
10. Distinction is important so that not in a few years our **children will believe that hospice means euthanasia**. Already today there are human patients that ask their hospice nurse on the intake when they will be euthanized. Not because they want to be, but because society has made them believe that is what happens. No matter where we stand regarding end-of-life care options for humans, we don’t want to feed into diluting the much valued position human hospice rightfully has gained.
11. Distinction is important so that people can be **better prepared to face death**. Those who gave, or even only prepared well, to give hospice to an animal, report having felt much better prepared also when present to, or caring for, dying human loved ones.
12. Distinction is important because those who have given hospice report experiencing **less intense grief** from what they expected, after their animal’s passing in its own time.
13. Distinction is important because in hospice an **animal’s will to live is honored**. It is recognized that just like in humans such will is often there even in the presence of some discomfort.

*Animal caregivers deserve free choice  
between the currently common veterinary practices at the end of life and hospice.  
Free choice depends on clear communication and an educated, correct use of terms.*