

Will your veterinarian support you in hospice care? Questions may help to find out

"I am a pediatric hospice nurse and it's amazing what we will do to help the two legged family members but sometimes ignore our four legged family members in their time of need."

Helpline Communication

If we choose hospice and aim for our animal passing in its own time, if comfort levels permit, how can we find out whether our veterinarian will be supportive of our endeavor? If a veterinary practice advertises hospice among their services, how can we learn more about what that entails, their level of experience and patient outcomes?

Such inquiries take time, so be prepared to pay your veterinarian/s for a consultation to be in exchange about your and their perspectives on what it means to provide hospice.

We highly recommend you have that kind of conversation well **before** your animal becomes critically ill so there is no pressure to act on either side, the veterinarian's or yours as the caregiver.

These are some of the questions that can be helpful to ask your veterinarian ahead of time:

- 1• Are you willing to support me and my animal when it is terminally ill if my aim is to have it pass on its own with comfort care as needed?
- 2• Have you supported an animal of your own in such manner?
- 3• Have you been present during a peaceful passing of an animal that died without euthanasia?
- 4• What is your perspective on death and dying?
- 5• Can you explain to me what to expect during the dying process and before, and how I can support my animal through this time?
- 6• Have you previously supported clients in giving hospice to their animal?
- 7• If yes, can you think of a client or two who gave hospice and had their animal pass on its own, who might be willing to share their experiences with me by phone?
- 8• Do you offer holistic modalities, or if not, are you open to collaborate with another veterinarian so my animal can receive integrative care?
- 9• Do you offer house visits for medical care or collaborate with someone who does (for instance a veterinary technician)?
- 10• Do you offer house visits for on-call in-home euthanasia or collaborate with another (house call) veterinarian who does, in case euthanasia would be needed during the night or on a weekend? (Does your veterinarian understand that in hospice, rather than pre-scheduled, euthanasia is performed only as a last resort if an animal's comfort cannot be sufficiently maintained? It is an exception, not the rule.)
- 11• If phone advice is needed outside of business hours, who could I call?
- 12• Are you able and willing to dispense injectable strong pain medications (including morphine) for me to keep on hand in small amounts sufficient to get my animal through a night if it were to suddenly experience strong pain?
- 13• If you were to guess, what percentage of your hospice patients have been able to pass peacefully in their own time?

"The will to live cannot be measured. This puts it beyond the reach of science. But we can't allow science to define life for us. Science will define life in its own way, but life is actually quite a bit larger than science. And things happen which are observable but not measurable." Rachel Naomi Remen, MD