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What matters most in the end: Geriatrics, hospice and euthanasia

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We are not trained at being good at death. As veterinarians are trained to cure, fight, manage and prevent. But aging, terminal illnesses, deciding quality of life and euthanasia are things we must all deal within our professional and even personal lives. It is our duty to learn about the aging process, how to help owners manage their aging pets, understand veterinary hospice and learn the best practices for euthanasia. Veterinary geriatric medicine: Veterinarians have a variety of tools to keep puppies and kittens healthy as they grow and we are well prepared to help our aging patients as they reach their senior years. The care and management of a geriatric pet, however, is very different for both the patient and the owners alike. As pets reach advanced ages and enter into this last life stage, owners are faced with a myriad of physical and emotional concerns (for both the pet and themselves). There is so much more that can be done within the veterinary profession to properly recognize this geriatric stage, keep the patient comfortable and help owners deal with their delicate, aging family members. The goal of proper and effective geriatric pet care is to enhance the quality of life for the pet and the owners, empower them to properly care for their pet during this delicate life phase and maintain the strength of human-animal bond. Veterinary hospice: Veterinary hospice is rapidly gaining traction and typically focuses on the terminal or chronically ill pet. Before and during this last stage, there is much we can do to help pets live a comfortable life as a geriatric. Our abilities to recognize and manage pain, anxiety, hygiene and other symptoms that may limit quality of life has advanced in recent years and our profession is seeking ways to identify these unique client and patient needs, communicate effectively, set realistic expectations and help guide pet parents with the care and management of their aging geriatric companion animal. Quality of life: Assessing the quality of life of a family pet is a delicate balance between managing client emotions, the progression of the disease and the happiness of the pet. These key issues are not always in harmony and it is the job of the veterinary professional team to manage and balance each party's interests with the natural developments of biology. Understanding common trends in both people and their pets helps better identify their needs, address their concerns and make a decision that does the most good for all involved. Euthanasia: The euthanasia appointment is unparalleled in emotion and sentiment. There are a few things in veterinary medicine or life moreover, that require as many outward displays of empathy, compassion and commiseration from a doctor. The tone of voice, delivery of words, bedside manner with both patient and client and the medical procedure itself become a delicate dance around death that doctor and staff should carefully choreograph and continually improve. It is only through this shared connection that the family will feel lovingly connected with your clinic, ensuring an unsurpassed level of client service.

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