

## End of Life Planning

### Why we offer End of Life Planning

Quite often, End of Life Planning is offered when your pet is in the advanced stages of a terminal illness, or approaching the end of their natural life. It may seem difficult to think about these things ahead of time, but it can be a great relief to have made many of the decisions already, so that when the time comes you can focus on being present in the moment with your pet.

It also gives you an opportunity to talk to a member of your veterinary team about your concerns, fears, and wishes, and ask any questions you may have about the process.

### How to use this guide

This guide will provide you with things that you may wish to think about, and explain the options you have available to you towards the end of your pet's life. It is a good idea to write down your thoughts, wishes, and questions, so that you can bring these to an appointment.

Once you have had time to consider everything, and note down your thoughts, feel free to make an appointment with a member of your veterinary team to ask your questions and make your wishes known to them.

### Quality of Life & Prognosis

This is one of the most important aspects in helping you decide when it is time to say goodbye. Our "Quality of Life Assessment" sheet can help you measure and monitor your pet's quality of life.

If your pet has a medical condition, it can help to ask your vet questions about what to expect towards the end. Whilst your vet cannot predict exactly what will happen or how fast, you might wish to ask

- What are the signs that my pet's condition is deteriorating?
- Are there treatments that can improve comfort, and what are the side-effects of these?
- What would happen if I allowed my pet to die naturally, would they die in their sleep?

### Your concerns for your pet's final days

It is natural to wonder about the final days, and worry about the uncertainty of it. It is important to share any concerns with your veterinary team, so that they can help. Perhaps consider

- Do you have any worries about what your pet might experience in their final days?
- Are you concerned about what your family might experience, or how to prepare children?
- Is there anything you would feel unable to cope with? This might be incontinence, seizures, giving multiple medications, or wound care, for example

- Is there anything you think your pet would be unable to cope with? This might be hospitalisation, multiple medications, or accidents in their bed, for example

No concern or fear is silly or trivial, they are all reasonable and valid, and your veterinary team are there to listen and help you navigate them.

### **Your wishes and options for euthanasia**

*Where would you like euthanasia to happen?*

Euthanasia can be performed during the day at our branches, or at any time of the day or night at our main hospital. If you have made a decision to euthanise, or are strongly considering it, please let our staff know when you book your appointment, so that a longer appointment time can be allocated to you and your pet.

Home visits can also be arranged for euthanasia during the daytime, but as this requires additional time and staffing, please give us as much notice as you can if you would like this for your pet.

*Who would you like to be there?*

This is a very personal decision, but is important to discuss with all those involved. If you have children, would they like to be there? Some people may wish to be present for sedation, where the pet goes into a light sleep, but may not wish to stay for the final euthanasia injection. You may have other pets that you wish to be present, but consider carefully whether this may add undue anxiety.

If euthanasia needs to be performed soon, but not everybody is present, you might ask your vet whether you can “buy time” with supportive treatments while you gather those who wish to be there.

*Do you have any questions about the act of euthanasia?*

You may have experienced euthanasia recently, or this could be your first time ever, or your first time in many years. Whatever your experiences, you may have questions about how the medication is given and how it works, what your pet might experience, and what you or your family might see. Our team have extensive experience of euthanasia and, while they can't guarantee exactly how it will be for you and your pet, they can talk to you about what you might expect and see.

### **Your wishes for final arrangements**

After your pet has passed, you will need to decide how you would like to take care of their body. The options available to you include:

**Burial:** either on your own property, at a pet cemetery, at a friend or family member's home, or somewhere else. Some things to consider are

- Do you have permission to bury your pet in your chosen location?
- Is there a risk that wildlife may interfere with your pet once they have been buried?
- Will you always live at or have access to the burial location?
- Would you like a casket to bury your pet in, or any special items to bury with them?

**Communal Cremation:** the practice can arrange for your pet to be taken to a crematorium and cremated with a small number of other pets. The ashes are then interred in the crematorium's memorial garden. Some things to consider are

- You will not be able to receive any ashes back from a communal cremation

- Communal cremation is typically more expensive than burial, but less so than individual cremation

**Individual Cremation:** the practice can arrange for your pet to be taken to a crematorium, and cremated on their own. This means their ashes can be returned to you. Some things to consider are

- What container you would like the ashes to be returned in
- Individual cremation is more expensive than communal cremation

You may wish to take your pet's body to the crematorium yourself. In this way, you may also be able to attend a cremation service. Calling the crematorium ahead of time is the best way to make arrangements, but you can call them before setting off if the euthanasia was unexpected.

### **Your wishes for remembrance and memorialisation**

Pets often hold as much importance in our lives as our human friends and family. You may feel that their life ought to be remembered, and their passing marked, by some act of remembrance. You might consider

- Lighting a candle with family and friends
- Reading a verse or poem
- Planting a tree or flower
- Where you would like to do this, and who you would like to be there

Memorialising pets can help you cope with grief, and remember happy times. It can be especially good for children. There are many options, and you might consider

- Keeping some fur to be framed, cast in resin, or made into jewellery
- Having ashes cast in resin or made into jewellery
- Placing a memorial stone, flagstone, or special rock in your garden
- Making a clay or ink pawprint
- Having a pet's portrait painted or drawn, or drawing one yourself

You might also consider donating to an animal charity in remembrance of your pet.

### **What to do next**

Now that you have considered and written down your thoughts and wishes, it is always a good idea to share them with your veterinary team. They can help answer your questions and address your concerns, and when the time comes for euthanasia, they will already know what you would like to happen.

Always remember that the choices you have made are not set in stone, and you can change your mind at any time.

### **Useful Resources**

*Pet Cremation Services* <https://www.pcsonline.org.uk/>

*Compassion Understood End of Life Support* <https://www.compassionunderstood.com/>

*The Ralph Site Pet Loss Support* <https://www.theralphsite.com/>