



Position SVK-ASMPA

Euthanasia – fortunately a difficult decision!

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At some point in life of our animal friend the time comes when we have to decide about life or death and, worst case, do the last favor to our animal friend and euthanise. In acute cases, such as serious accidents or cancers with bleeding tumors, the decision often has to be made quickly and without any long consideration. In the case of old animals and/or chronic diseases, there is usually more time to make a decision. However, this does not make it any easier to decide when the right time comes to let our friend go.

Although over the past 20 years, modern veterinary medicine has become very similar to human medicine and although, a lot of options are therapeutically possible and also feasible, veterinarians are particularly concerned with ethical principles in relation to euthanasia. The five internationally recognised freedoms must always be taken into account when dealing with animals:

- Freedom from hunger, thirst and malnutrition
- Freedom from pain and discomfort
- Freedom from pain, injury and disease
- Freedom from fear and suffering
- Freedom to live out normal behavior.

Furthermore, euthanasia should only be carried out if a reasonable cause has been established after a conscientious diagnosis and prognosis, taking into account the expected further quality of life. For the painless death, the least stressful method must be chosen for the animal and it must always be carried out with respect for the animal and the animal owner. An extension of suffering or a reduction in life at the request of an owner alone, for example due to lack of time or scarce financial resources and upcoming operations, must be clearly rejected.

Especially in geriatric and/or chronically ill patients, veterinarians often reach their medical limits and the owners reach their limits in looking after their pet. When assessing euthanasia in these cases, it should be clearly considered whether the last medically feasible options really make sense.

From a veterinary point of view, the top priority in deciding for or against euthanasia is to assess the individual animal's quality of life. Even if the animal could be cared for around the clock, just like seriously ill humans, even if the pet takes up food regularly and does not show any obvious pain, it is important to include all the circumstances before making the decision, whether the pet's condition is still worth living for the pet itself. Any limitations to art typical behaviors must also be taken into account, especially if the animal can hardly move and/or can no longer control its body excretions.



Schweizerische Vereinigung für Kleintiermedizin
Association Suisse pour la Médecine des Petits Animaux
Associazione Svizzera per la Medicina dei Piccoli Animali
Swiss Association for Small Animal Medicine

From our point of view, it is also indefensible if animal owners leave a seriously ill animal to care for itself and wait and see if it dies on its own. From the animal's point of view and with regards to the shortest possible suffering time, no ceremonial nor terminal care should be given to the pet. This serves mainly the owners and usually means only further stress for the pet.

According to the animal protection laws, it is forbidden to let an animal suffer unnecessarily and death must come with dignity while avoiding unnecessary pain, suffering and anxiety. Methods should be used that require no or only short fixation and put as little strain on the pet as possible. Animal protection rules also call for killing methods which lead to immediate loss of sensitivity and perception. The process of killing must be monitored until death occurs. An essential prerequisite for the painless killing is that euthanasia is carried out by an experienced veterinarian who is familiar with the methods and the pet species in question.

It is always hard to decide about life and death. Due to their training, veterinarians are able to assess the individual quality of life of pets. They are also able to professionally and empathically accompany the animal owners in their decision. Often, this very difficult decision is the last favor one can do to our faithful companions. It is certainly an advantage to have your own vet who you fully trust and who knows your pet well. In a difficult situation like this he or she can provide advice and support to all those involved.

There is also the possibility of letting the animal fall asleep at home. Many vets offer home visits. Discuss your ideas with your vet at an early stage. For some pets, euthanasia can be more peaceful and stress-free in the

usual environment. This often makes it possible to say goodbye to all members of the family, which is especially important for children and adolescents. In an emergency, however, the veterinary practice should preferably be visited so that the pet does not have to suffer any longer than necessary.

A dignified farewell is a fond reminder of a life together with the beloved pet. What happens to the pet after euthanasia is in the responsibility of the owners. They also carry the costs. In general, there are three options: Cremation in an animal crematorium, burial (in your own garden up to 10kg or in an animal cemetery) or disposal via the cadaver collection points of the municipalities. Ideally, this is discussed before euthanasia between the owners and the vet.

DR. MED. VET. BRUNNER KÄTHI

Tierarztpraxis Brunner Richenstein
4142 Münchenstein

STVT – Swiss Veterinarian Association for
Animal Protection