

# The Colorado State University Pet Hospice Program: End-of-Life Care for Pets and Their Families

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### ABSTRACT

While the concept of hospice care for humans has existed for decades and is an integral part of the dying process, providing hospice care for companion animals is a new and growing service. Veterinarians and pet-owners have recently recognized that there is a need and a demand to care for pets with terminal illnesses. The Colorado State University Pet Hospice program meets those needs through supporting pets, their owners, and veterinarians, and educating professional veterinary students in end-of-life care. Developed in 2003, Pet Hospice is a student-run program that trains veterinary students in animal hospice care, and matches them with the family and veterinarian of a terminally ill pet in the community. Since its inception, 101 veterinary student volunteers have been trained and provided support to 68 families. Continued expansion of the client base, enlargement of the network of veterinarians and volunteers, and positive program evaluations reflect the strong impact of Pet Hospice and its support from veterinary students, veterinarians, and the community.

**Key words:** pet loss, hospice, euthanasia, palliative care, end-of-life, quality of life, student programs, human–animal bond

### INTRODUCTION

The term “hospice” has been used since medieval times, when a hospice was a place of lodging where weary travelers could find shelter and respite from their journey. Today, the concept of “hospice” encompasses an extensive model of care, whereby services are tailored to the individual needs of the terminally ill patient and their family. The modern concept of hospice care—taking care of the dying patient and their family’s physical, spiritual, emotional, and financial needs—was first pioneered by Dr. Cicely Saunders, a British physician who opened the first in-patient hospice in London, England, in 1967.<sup>1</sup> The principles of hospice care spread to the United States more than three decades ago, as consumers and health care professionals recognized that the fragmented health care system was failing the dying.<sup>1,2</sup> Although the original philosophy of care was embraced, over time the focus and delivery of services shifted from in-patient units to in-home care, and hospice care is now provided within a variety of settings.

One of the unique aspects of the hospice philosophy is the integrative approach; both the patient and their family are seen as the unit of care, and a plan of care is individualized to meet their specific needs and different lifestyles.<sup>3</sup> Throughout the process, hospice care affirms life and promotes self-determination. Hospice care has been shown to benefit family members of the terminally ill by preparing them emotionally, improving their coping skills, and providing them with a support system.<sup>4</sup> In this manner, a hospice promotes the philosophy that the journey of life eventually leads to death and emphasizes palliative care, which includes physical, emotional, and spiritual comfort delivered by an interdisciplinary team of professionals and volunteers. This team usually comprises hospice nurses, social workers, an overseeing physician, and family members who assist in implementing the plan of care.<sup>2</sup>

Today, companion animals are recognized as part of the family. Eighty-four percent of pet owners refer to themselves as their pet’s “mom” or “dad.”<sup>5</sup> Given these strong emotional ties, it seems appropriate and necessary to extend hospice care to terminally ill pets and their families. The pet hospice philosophy is modeled after that of human hospices; it functions on the principle that death is a part of life. Pet hospices address pain control and attend to the physical and emotional comfort of the pet, while providing educational and emotional support to the family. The veterinary team trains caregivers to administer medications, assess pain, monitor pain management, and evaluate proper hydration and nutrition, and educates families in the grief process.

The differences between human and pet hospices are becoming fewer over time, although each has unique characteristics. A criterion for entering care in a human hospice is a diagnosis of six months or less to live, while life expectancy in pet hospices is usually days to weeks. Human hospices offer an interdisciplinary team of professionals to care for patients and their families, while a pet hospice team consists only of the veterinarian and perhaps their technicians. Unlike pet hospices, human hospices mandate that bereavement counseling is offered to families for up to a year after the death of the patient. One stark difference is that euthanasia decision-making is supported through pet hospices. Pet hospices represent a time of transition between treatment and death.

The veterinary community has responded to the demand for end-of-life care for animals by publishing guidelines for appropriate hospice care. American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) guidelines ensure quality of life through adequate pain management, regular monitoring by veterinary staff, and the availability of emotional resources for pet owners.<sup>6</sup> These guidelines have created a

standard of care, and act as a reference for veterinarians creating animal hospice programs across the country.<sup>7</sup>

The veterinarian plays a critical role in how owners experience the death of their pet, and can greatly impact an owner's ability to grieve.<sup>8</sup> Researchers have found that many owners feel veterinarians are best equipped to provide emotional support during end-of-life care for their pet; given their substantial influence, it is essential for veterinarians to receive adequate training regarding owner grief.<sup>9</sup> While outside resources such as human hospice training or veterinarian continuing education opportunities are available, most veterinary students receive only cursory training in end-of-life care for pet owners and their animals.<sup>10</sup> Similar concerns have been raised within the human medical field, and the American Medical Association has responded by providing a workshop addressing care for terminally ill patients.<sup>11</sup> By addressing palliative care and grief within the curriculum, doctors and veterinarians alike will be better trained to respond to the demand for end-of-life and hospice care.

The relevance and impact of a pet hospice program includes providing a valued service to the surrounding community and enhancing veterinary student education. Colorado State University's (CSU) College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences (CVMBBS) has developed the nation's first pet hospice program based in a veterinary teaching hospital. The CSU Pet Hospice program (Pet Hospice) is run by professional veterinary medicine (PVM) students, supported by the Argus Institute, and has provided pet hospice care for the Fort Collins, Colorado, area since 2004.

Pet Hospice provides a much needed service for the surrounding community. Families and their dying companion animals receive supportive care in their home from PVM student volunteers, who are under the supervision and instruction of a veterinarian. The veterinarian is kept well informed on the status of their patient and his/her family, while offering a valuable service to their clients.

Teaching the hospice philosophy and offering students the opportunity to engage in end-of-life discussions, while providing hospice care in a home environment, expands students' professional depth and qualifications as future veterinarians. Pet Hospice volunteers receive training and experience beyond the core curriculum, augmenting their skills and increasing their confidence in conducting end-of-life conversations. Students interact with community and university veterinarians, gaining skills in creating plans for care, writing case notes, and developing professional relationships. Student team managers gain additional skills in management, program development, and volunteer recruitment and retention.

The purpose of this paper is to describe Pet Hospice as a model for establishing similar programs in other veterinary colleges and within communities.

## **HISTORY**

In 2002, Charles Johnson, DVM, and Jack Lebel, DVM, envisioned starting a community hospice program for pets. They gathered several interested parties to brainstorm the idea, and CSU's Argus Institute was invited to assist with the planning process. Gail Bishop, the clinic

coordinator for the Argus Institute with 17 years of human hospice experience, became involved and the Pet Hospice task force was created. The task force involved area veterinarians, a representative from the local human hospice agency, and a representative from the local community college, which offers a veterinary technician degree. The task force used various resources, including the local human hospice organization, AVMA guidelines, and the expertise of task force members. A supportive partnership with the local human hospice organization was instrumental to program development, particularly in infrastructure design; recruitment, training, and retention plans for volunteers; and creating job descriptions.

The task force met on a regular basis for one year, designing the basic structure of the program. During that year, the concept of involving PVM student volunteers in the delivery of services was solidified, and the Argus Institute agreed to oversee the program. A mission statement was created and job descriptions, guidelines, procedures, and protocols were designed. Goals and objectives were identified and educational meetings were held with veterinary college administrators to engender support and ensure collaboration with the project. The program received approval from the office of the CVMBBS Dean, and from the VTH administration. PVM students at CSU were polled for their interest in participating; their response was overwhelmingly positive. Similarly, a brief survey was mailed to all area veterinarians to determine their interest in the program, and the response was again strongly positive.

The Pet Hospice task force, having completed most of its original goals and objectives, was reduced in size to a team of two: Julia Brannan, DVM, and Gail Bishop; Drs. Charles Johnson and Jack Lebel were retained as consultants. These four individuals continued to meet throughout the fall of 2003 and spring of 2004 to further define the program's structure, garner continued support among area veterinarians, and pursue funding opportunities. The first Pet Hospice volunteer training session was held in the spring of 2004, and the program was launched with 18 volunteers. That same year, six veterinary clinics attended orientation training and the program was ready to receive its first case, which was referred from CSU's James L. Voss Veterinary Teaching Hospital (VTH) in the fall of 2004.

## **Program Mission and Objectives**

The mission of Pet Hospice is to provide compassionate end-of-life care for pets and emotional support and education for their families. The objectives are four-fold: 1) to provide medical care to terminally ill pets in a home setting; 2) to offer owners with emotional support and grief education to cope with the impending loss of their pet; 3) to assist the referring veterinarian in providing palliative care for their patient; and 4) to educate veterinary students in providing end-of-life care for companion animals and their families.

## **METHODS**

### **Leadership Team**

Pet Hospice is a student-run organization that is advised by the community outreach coordinator of the Argus

Institute and a veterinarian on faculty at the CSU VTH. These advisors work closely with team managers to coordinate Pet Hospice activities, define the goals and protocols of the Pet Hospice program, oversee volunteer training, and interview and select future team managers.

The Pet Hospice program is managed by two PVM student team managers, one each from the second- and third-year classes. These students are selected at the end of their first year of veterinary school through an application and interview process, with a two-year term of service. This ensures that the program is piloted by one senior manager who has gained experience working in the program over the past school year, and one junior manager who supports the senior manager and learns the protocols and procedures of Pet Hospice before becoming the senior team manager.

The tasks of the Pet Hospice team managers are as follows:

- Respond to all inquires regarding Pet Hospice through the Pet Hospice telephone, e-mail account, or in person from interested parties.
- Assess incoming cases, explain Pet Hospice procedures to the owner and the veterinarian, and assign volunteer case managers to the case.
- Maintain communication with the case managers and assist them as necessary in providing services to clients.
- Plan and execute all volunteer training sessions.
- Interview and select new volunteers.
- Develop and update training material and Pet Hospice procedures documents.
- Orient veterinarians and their staff on to how to use Pet Hospice services.
- Serve as a liaison between the program and the community at large.

The senior team manager publishes a monthly newsletter that is distributed to all Pet Hospice volunteers. Through the newsletter, the team managers communicate with volunteers about open and closed cases, publicity, changes to procedures, and general announcements.

#### **Case Management Team**

PVM student volunteers are recruited to be case managers from the first-, second-, and third-year veterinary classes once per year during the fall semester. The team managers conduct an information session and encourage interested students to apply. Team managers interview all interested candidates and document their level of veterinary medical experience in order to appropriately assign cases that require particular veterinary medical skills. Key duties of case managers include the following:

- Work with team managers to obtain knowledge about the case before the initial meeting.
- Team with another case manager to manage the case.
- Act as the liaison between the client, their pet, and the referring veterinarian.
- Assist the referring veterinarian with the medical needs of the patient.

- Support the client/family through education, communication, and preparation.

Upon selection for the program, student case managers are formally oriented to the philosophy of Pet Hospice and its objectives. Each PVM student is given a "Procedures and Protocols" manual, which contains all the necessary information, forms, and guidelines for supporting a Pet Hospice case. Volunteers participate in four training sessions over the course of the school year. Topics covered at these sessions include nursing care of the terminally ill patient, pain assessment, end-of-life communication, case reviews, and simulated interactions with grieving clients. All students are also provided with AVMA PLIT Student Liability coverage; Dr. Charles Johnson acts as sponsoring veterinarian and Pet Hospice pays the dues for all of its volunteers.

For reasons of safety, support, and mentoring, case managers work cases in pairs. They are equipped with a home-visit bag containing basic medical supplies (i.e., grooming supplies, thermometers, cotton balls, hydrogen peroxide, alcohol, and paper towels) and clay paw-print kits. Case managers are asked to bring their own stethoscopes; Pet Hospice provides clippers and bandage-changing supplies as needed. A case manager's kit also includes literature about the grieving process, helping children with the death of a pet, and how to memorialize the loss of a pet. Case managers discuss this information with clients, and often find that doing so helps owners to deal more openly with their feelings about losing their pet and allows them to make an appropriate plan for end-of-life care for their pet.

To ensure that clients understand what to do if their pet becomes acutely ill, case managers discuss the emergency plan as outlined by the referring veterinarian on the first home visit. Important information and telephone numbers are written on a laminated card in case of emergency. Pet Hospice case managers are advised to place this card on the client's refrigerator and secure it with a magnet that is pre-printed with the Pet Hospice telephone number.

Veterinary clinics partner with Pet Hospice when they either have a patient who is a candidate for hospice care or when an owner expresses interest in Pet Hospice care. One of the team managers orients the clinic to the policies and procedures of the Pet Hospice program. Each clinic is provided with a manual containing the steps for referring a case to Pet Hospice, guidelines for appropriate case selection, and communication procedures. Upon enrollment, the clinic submits information regarding that particular veterinarian's euthanasia protocols, body-care procedures, and instructions for emergency situations.

For each individual referral the veterinarian submits medical case information, including the specific disease process, instructions for treatment and medications the animal is receiving. The case instructions are saved on the private Pet Hospice Web site and a copy is e-mailed to each case manager assigned to the case. Throughout the case, the referring veterinarian is in regular contact with the case managers, receiving updates on the progress of the pet, and giving instructions regarding treatments and client care.

## Case Management

Veterinarians are encouraged to discuss the appropriateness of individual cases with the Pet Hospice team managers. The following guidelines are used to help referring veterinarians identify suitable cases:

- The animal must be terminally ill with a life expectancy of three months or less, either due to natural causes or the owner's choice of euthanasia.
- The pet's condition must be such that it can be made comfortable at home.
- The animal's home medical needs should be relatively simple in nature. More advanced procedures should be performed by the referring veterinarian.
- The client must be willing and able to work with our PVM student volunteers in their home.
- The pet's temperament should be amenable that it can interact with Pet Hospice volunteers in a safe manner.
- The client's home needs to be within 30 minutes drive of the CSU VTH.

After a case is referred to Pet Hospice, a team manager first contacts the referring veterinarian to gain more details regarding the case, then the pet owner to assess what kind of assistance they desire from the program, and finally the two case managers to brief them on the case. One of the case managers then calls the pet owner to arrange an initial meeting with the pet and family. The number and frequency of subsequent meetings are based on the needs of the pet and the owner. The case managers are always available for telephone consultations and impromptu meetings if necessary. Every significant contact (a meeting or involved telephone conversation) is documented and forwarded to the referring veterinarian, team managers, and advisors for support.

Upon closure of a Pet Hospice case, either due to euthanasia or the natural death of the patient, Pet Hospice case managers send a condolence card with a personalized note to the owners, and make a telephone call and/or visit within two days of the pet's death. The purpose is to ensure that Pet Hospice has done all that it could to help the family in dealing with their pet's death and to offer or recommend additional support or resources. On rare occasions, case managers have referred clients to local mental health services when it becomes clear that the owner is grieving to the extent that Pet Hospice personnel are not qualified to help. The final responsibility of the case managers is to complete a case summary for Pet Hospice's records, and a copy is provided to the referring veterinarian.

Upon resolution of a case, a team manager sends a survey to the referring veterinarian requesting their feedback on the case management. A survey is also sent to the family of the pet no less than one month after the pet's death to ascertain the family's level of satisfaction with the care provided to them by Pet Hospice. Both surveys inform Pet Hospice about how to modify procedures to better serve our clients and veterinarians. In composing the case summary, case managers provide feedback and suggestions regarding the case and the program as a whole.

## Program Development

Since its inception in 2002, the CSU Pet Hospice program has continually evolved to meet the needs of its clients and volunteer PVM students, and the protocols and procedures have been modified based on feedback from key stakeholders. As the caseload increased, it became obvious that the team managers, case managers, and advisors needed to access program information in a timely fashion from multiple locations. This resulted in the creation of a private Pet Hospice Web site, which serves as a central communication resource and contains pertinent communication documents related to open and closed cases

The annual budget of the Pet Hospice program is \$3,000. Nearly half the budget is used for volunteer recruitment, training, and retention, and one-third for printing brochures and supportive literature. Other expenses include office supplies, medical supplies, liability insurance dues, and telephone bills. The service is provided to veterinarians, clients, and their pets at no cost. Funding for the CSU Pet Hospice comes from private donations of previous clients, the CSU Student Chapter of the AVMA, fundraising events, and granting foundations.

The CSU Pet Hospice seeks the active involvement of the Fort Collins' community, and thus promotes awareness of the hospice through participation in animal-related events and local media requests for interviews and information. The goal of these activities is to promote the concept of hospice care for animals, as well as to increase awareness among pet owners of need for quality end-of-life care for pets and their families. It is the experience of CSU Pet Hospice that while it is often difficult to gain the attention of veterinarians in busy practices, the concept of a pet hospice is readily embraced by pet owners who have lost animals in the past or who anticipate the death of a pet at some time in the future.

## RESULTS

Pet Hospice supported four cases in its inaugural year (2004), 13 cases in 2005, 19 cases in 2006, 16 cases in 2007 and 16 cases to date in 2008. As many as seven cases were managed during one period of time. Since 2004, the total number of veterinary clinics that utilize CSU Pet Hospice services has grown from seven to 24 practices, and the number of veterinarians involved has more than quadrupled to 50 veterinarians. Pet Hospice began with 18 volunteers in 2004 and has trained a total of 101 volunteers since its inception.

The majority (70.2%) of CSU Pet Hospice cases to date have involved animals diagnosed with cancer. Of these, 17.2% of cases involved osteosarcoma and 19.2% lymphoma. Renal failure has been another common diagnosis (16.4% of cases), while less common diagnoses have included failure, hyperthyroidism, feline infectious peritonitis, arthritis, cerebellar disease, and degenerative myelopathy. Thirty four percent (23/68) of cases have been referred from the CSU VTH, primarily either the oncology or internal medicine services. The remaining 45 cases were referred from 19 local veterinary clinics.

The length of a case and the number of case manager visits has varied according to the animal's disease process and the client's needs. The duration of Pet Hospice cases has ranged

from one to 290 days, with a mean of 46.7 days. The number of contacts between case managers and clients has varied from one to 17, with a mean of 4.7 contacts. Client contact is defined as either an involved telephone conversation with the client or a visit to the client's home.

Program evaluation includes feedback from participating veterinarians, PVM students, and clients. The response rate for the end-of-case veterinary surveys from 2004 through mid-2008 was 34.7% (17/49). Veterinarians were asked to evaluate the following areas: volunteer–client–veterinarian communication, patient care, client feedback, case documentation, quality of service, timeliness of service, and likelihood of Pet Hospice recommendation to future clients. Although the response rate was low, veterinary feedback was positive.

Volunteer feedback has been instrumental in the evolution of Pet Hospice. Volunteers identified the need for a private web site to facilitate communication regarding cases and gain access to digital forms used by the program. The contents of medical kits are continually being updated based on suggestions by case managers. Volunteers also requested more interactive training sessions, which led to the addition of role-playing exercises to volunteer training.

Client feedback has been highly positive. Several clients have expressed an appreciation of the volunteers' availability and having a person to contact when they needed information regarding their pet. Others have reported that it was helpful to have an outside perspective, and benefited from the grief and loss resources provided. Clients noted that they would have liked to have known about Pet Hospice services sooner and would recommend the service to others.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Impact on Student Volunteers**

Pet Hospice provides CSU PVM students with a unique educational opportunity. Although discussions involving end-of-life issues and communication skills are present in the PVM curriculum, students benefit from increased exposure and from conducting difficult end-of-life conversations in person. As a student-run service, case managers work exclusively with grieving clients in their homes. Such experiences improve the student's ability to communicate effectively with clients, empathize, and understand the grieving process. Additionally, the intimate experience of working with a client and their dying animal enhances the student's understanding of the human–animal bond and develops tools for supporting clients' needs. Anecdotally, Pet Hospice volunteers demonstrate a greater skill level in discussing end-of-life issues with clients in the communication curriculum, as perceived by the instructors. Volunteering with Pet Hospice prepares future veterinarians to provide hospice care for pets and facilitate end-of-life conversations with families.

The responsibilities of the two team managers promote development of communication and leadership skills. Specifically, team managers develop public-speaking skills through community presentations, volunteer training, and on-site veterinary orientation sessions. Pet Hospice team managers also gain experience in human resources

and administration, and motivating and managing a large number of volunteers, enhancing their ability to be a successful leader in a practice environment.

The CSU Pet Hospice program helps to build relationships between current PVM students, practicing veterinarians, and CSU. Student volunteers have the opportunity to work closely with community veterinarians and thus experience different approaches to case management. Students learn from veterinarians in the practice setting, which complements their training in the academic setting. Pet Hospice case managers also further develop their nursing skills (e.g., maintaining intravenous catheters and feeding tubes, changing bandages, performing physical examinations, and assessing pain using several widely accepted pain scales<sup>12</sup>).

### **Impact on Veterinarians**

Through Pet Hospice, veterinarians can facilitate a valuable service for their clients, which is offered at no charge, and receive updates about their patient from a medically trained individual. Clinicians often do not have enough time or training to provide in-home veterinary care and the emotional support many grieving pet owners need.<sup>10</sup> Pet Hospice volunteers relay important medical information from the veterinarian to the pet owner, and provide emotional support and resources on pet loss and grief. Offering hospice care to clients builds long-term veterinarian–client–patient relationships through high-quality animal health care. In addition, veterinarians involved in Pet Hospice have the opportunity to support the professional development of future veterinarians to serve animals and society.

### **Impact on Clients and their Pets**

Pet owners are offered a unique service to care for their animal in the comfort of their home and are supported emotionally through the end-of-life process. Clients and pets avoid numerous trips to the veterinary hospital by having volunteers assess their pet in the home. Volunteers regularly monitor the animal's condition, supporting the owner's observations. Pet owners are given time to adjust to the idea of losing their companion to a terminal illness. Learning that one's companion has a terminal diagnosis can be devastating and having a support team, education, and resources can be empowering.

Making decisions regarding euthanasia can be extremely difficult, and owners often struggle with guilt when making this decision.<sup>13</sup> Education is provided to help owners assess their companion's quality of life. These difficult end-of-life discussions are facilitated by Pet Hospice volunteers, who provide resources on pet loss and grief. Discussing end-of-life issues helps pet owners balance the desire to keep their pet with them for as long as possible with the goal of ensuring the animal's quality of life. Several clients have requested that Pet Hospice volunteers accompany them during the euthanasia procedure as an additional source of support. Hospice volunteers also play a role in educating parents on how to help their children through pet loss, which is often a child's first experience with death. Developing grief-coping strategies as a child allows us to better process loss as an adult.<sup>14</sup>

Most importantly, animals benefit from a hospice philosophy that emphasizes quality of life and pain control, and

aims to have a pet rest comfortably in their own home. Fewer trips to the veterinary clinic reduce overall animal stress and anxiety. Regular assessments by a trained volunteer ensure appropriate comfort care and timely reporting of concerns to the veterinarian. As pet owners become better educated on in-home care, the animals receive higher-quality treatment and early detection and alleviation of pain and suffering. Pet hospice care allows pets to spend their last days with their family in a comfortable and familiar setting.

### **Challenges Faced by CSU's Pet Hospice**

Since Pet Hospice started, interest in animal hospice care has grown significantly. The program has received numerous inquiries from across the United States from other veterinary schools, private practitioners, and citizens within the community who are interested in establishing a pet hospice program of their own. The CSU Pet Hospice program serves as an important national resource and as a model for pet hospices at veterinary facilities.

One challenge of the program is working with clients who do not have a professional relationship with a veterinarian. On several occasions we have been contacted by an owner who is interested in Pet Hospice care for their animal, but the animal has not recently been examined by a veterinarian or given a diagnosis. It is Pet Hospice policy that an animal must be diagnosed with a terminal condition by a veterinarian who is willing to provide information about the disease, case supervision, and consistent interaction with case managers. Successful case management is dependent upon a strong veterinarian–client–patient relationship. The veterinarian provides the Pet Hospice case manager with the goals of the care plan, how the animal's medical needs should be met, and what the role of the volunteer will be in the case. Pet Hospice is a service that veterinarians can offer their clients and this service varies depending on the needs identified by the veterinarian. In some cases, the supporting veterinarian may only request that Pet Hospice provide their client with emotional support and resources for making end-of-life decisions, while in other cases the patient may need regular nursing care.

Another challenge has been communication with veterinarians due to their busy schedules. To ensure that clients are provided with the best possible service, volunteers need to contact the supporting veterinarian in a timely manner. As veterinarians are usually occupied with their daily duties, communication is often conducted via e-mail or fax. A possible solution would be to have an assigned contact person within the practice, who would act as an interface between the veterinarian and the Pet Hospice case manager. Another scenario common to multi-doctor practices is having several veterinarians involved with the case; maintaining up-to-date communication with all clinicians, as well as the client, can be difficult. The creation of digital forms and use of electronic communication has been helpful when communicating with several parties. In addition, the low response rate of veterinarian surveys has resulted in the development of a follow-up protocol to increase feedback.

A key principle of Pet Hospice is keeping the animal comfortable in the home; many pet owners additionally request an in-home euthanasia. Some veterinarians do not provide this service, and thus details about the case need to

be discussed with the client early in the case to make necessary arrangements. Pet Hospice case managers provide clients with information regarding veterinarians who provide in-home euthanasia services, body-care options, and other methods of memorializing their pet. Case managers offer to help schedule a euthanasia appointment with the veterinarian and to be present with the family during the euthanasia procedure.

Although the number of cases has grown, the number of volunteers exceeds the number of cases presented to Pet Hospice. It can be challenging to maintain the interest of volunteers without providing them with an opportunity to work directly with a patient and client. To maintain volunteer engagement, volunteers attend debriefing sessions in which active and previous cases are discussed. During these sessions, case managers provide the group with a summary of the case, challenges, and lessons learned. Additionally, training sessions provide students with valuable information pertaining to end-of-life care, including pain management, client communication, and in-home nursing care. As Pet Hospice becomes established in the community, we foresee the caseload increasing to consistently provide all volunteers with a regular opportunity to serve as a case manager. During summer months and holidays, when many PVM students are out of town, Pet Hospice has encountered periods of time with decreased volunteers available to handle incoming cases, so students worked multiple cases at once.

### **The Future of CSU's Pet Hospice**

With any novel program, it takes time to achieve "buy in" within the community. Hospice care for pets is a relatively new concept nationally and veterinarians may not consider offering hospice care for their patients. Some veterinarians may not be aware of the concept of hospice care for companion animals or the existence of a regional program. Others may be resistant to offering Pet Hospice to their clients because of a misunderstanding of the hospice's philosophy. Sometimes the term "hospice" is associated with palliative care in which euthanasia is not an option.

The goal of Pet Hospice is to support pet owners and their families as they transition from a terminal diagnosis to the death of their pet. The decision to euthanize is solely that of the client, and Pet Hospice volunteers support the decision the client makes in conjunction with their veterinarian. Pet Hospice offers in-clinic educational presentations to veterinarians and provides information for their clients. Responses to local publications and word of mouth about the program have indicated a tremendous interest from the public, and it is often the client that approaches their veterinarian about Pet Hospice care.

There appears to be a strong community interest in hospice care for companion animals. Pets are considered family members, and clients are seeking out methods to keep their companions comfortable in old age through services such as hospice care. It is the goal of Pet Hospice to continue to develop the program in the local community, as well as to provide models of care, resources, and support for those interested in providing hospice care within their own communities; the program has established a set of protocols and guidelines for hospice care as a model for the development of other pet hospice programs.

The Pet Hospice program at CSU has been successful in providing a learning opportunity for PVM students, a community service, and a national resource. One of our continuing goals is to ensure quality of care for terminally ill companion animals.

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