

# Armstrong Veterinary Clinic

At Armstrong Veterinary Clinic, we understand that making the decision to euthanize a beloved pet is one of the hardest choices you'll ever face. Our goal is to provide you with the support and information you need during this difficult time. This handout is designed to help you recognize when it might be time to consider euthanasia for your pet and to guide you through the process with compassion and understanding.

We have tried to include as much information here as possible and you are welcome to read as much or as little as you are comfortable with. Please know we are available to talk and answer questions if needed.

## How can I know that it is the right time for end of life?

### Appetite, Ambulatory, Interest:

Is my pet;

- Eating readily most of the time?
- Able to ambulate well enough to maintain dignity and get to favored resting places?
- Has interest in family, housemates and surroundings – still greets you – seems to enjoy interactions?

No one knows your pet better than you, “ you will know” when the time comes.

## Is my pet in pain? Or how long do we have? Or Will my pet suffer?

- These may be conversations best had with your veterinarian.
- Appetite, Ambulatory and Interest likely lacking if pain is not well controlled.

### When the time is drawing near.

We encourage you to talk about your wishes for end of life, and aftercare, well ahead of time. We have worked with Okanagan Pet Cremation for many years and with complete confidence. If you choose cremation, we will make the arrangements and will call you when the ashes are returned to us, usually within a week or so. Please visit Okanagan Pet Cremation's website for information regarding their services and keepsakes. You'll find some great information about pet loss and grief there too.

You have a couple of options when it comes to cremation for your pet. In a **Private Cremation**, only one pet is placed in the cremation chamber and cremated alone, with the cremated remains returned to you. In a **Communal Cremation**, multiple pets are cremated together, and no cremated remains are returned; instead, they are respectfully scattered by the crematory staff in a dignified manner and location.

Should you choose to take your pet's remains home for burial, please keep in mind we have used drugs to perform the euthanasia and wild-life, or water courses will be harmed by contact with the body.

### Plan the day

If there are family members or close friends who you wish to be present, let us know and we will do our best to accommodate. Having people who understand and are able to support you is important.

Euthanasia is provided by appointment. We want to do our best to be prepared for you, including having a designated place ready. We have a dedicated compassion suite which is the preferred place for these sensitive appointments. We are also able to use the clinic consult rooms, or for dogs, outside on the lawn or sometimes in your own vehicle that is parked towards the back for some privacy. If you elect to keep your dog in the vehicle, we'll need good access like an SUV or pick-up truck. You may want to have a plastic protective sheet under absorbent bedding as loss of urine is not uncommon following the procedure.

Do you want to have a consultation with your veterinarian for some support in making the final decision? Let us know and we will schedule accordingly.

If your pet is very anxious about traveling in the vehicle or coming to the vet, sometimes the veterinarian can prescribe meds to be given at home prior to the appointment to help reduce that stress and anxiety.

You are welcome to bring a favorite blanket or small pet bed to increase comfort. Please be sure to take home any you wish to keep. We have a supply of blankets and towels on hand too.

On the day of, there will be papers to read and sign and aftercare to be confirmed. We will be able to estimate the costs when we talk prior to the appointment. Papers and payments can be done in advance if you choose, then all your focus can be on your pet at the appointment.

### The actual procedure

Please know, you are welcome to be present but in no way obligated. If you stay, you may at any point during the visit look away, step away or leave. We will do everything in our power to support you and most importantly, support your pet.

It is always our intention to make the end of life as comfortable as possible for you and your pet. The most often followed protocol starts with one of our veterinary technicians administering a dose of sedation, usually by an injection under the skin much like a vaccine is given. This medication will help your pet feel relaxed and restful, usually within 10 minutes or so. The level of sedation achieved varies for several reasons that include the age and frailty of the patient and the choice of drugs used. If we have not reached the level of sedation hoped for, we will not rush things. The sedation is intended to make the IV injection, that is the final injection, easier, so we may choose to add some sedation and wait a little longer before proceeding.

When the veterinarian and technician agree your pet is ready, and you confirm, we will prepare to do an intravenous injection using a barbiturate that will stop the brain and heart function, causing death. An area will be clipped free of hair and the technician will help support your pet for the injection. We have sometimes likened this process to going under anesthetic. Once the medication is being injected into the vein, your pet will likely be unconscious in only a matter of several seconds. On occasion there may be some vocalizations or deep heavy breathing, referred to as the excitatory stage, as they pass away. Please be assured that this is not a response to pain but something that can occur before becoming unconscious.

After withdrawing the needle, the veterinarian will use a stethoscope and let you know when your pet's heart has stopped.

#### Sometimes there are variations in best protocol

Sometimes, especially in older frail patients, 'finding the vein' can be challenging. The veterinarian will choose to place a catheter in the vein or use a needle on a syringe to administer the medication. If the veterinarian chooses to place a catheter, we will often bring your pet into our treatment room where we have more hands to help, and the equipment needed. The catheter will be taped in, not unlike an intravenous port for humans. Once the catheter is in place, we will bring your pet back to you and give you a chance to settle in together before administering the euthanasia drug.

#### When death occurs

As death occurs and even for a short time after the heart has stopped, there can be muscle contractions and tremors. In the case of the diaphragm muscle, it can look like your pet is taking breaths. It is likely to see bladder and sometimes bowel evacuations after death. In some bodies there may be fluid drain from the mouth or nose. Having absorbent bedding can help manage this very normal process.

If you are taking your pet home for burial, we recommend they be 'tucked in' to the desired burial position before too long using a burial shroud, box or casket. Moving their limbs later can be difficult.

If there are questions or things you wish to talk about, please do not hesitate to talk to us.

Please know we value the trust you are placing in us as you travel this journey.

We wish for you, before too long, to remember your good friend with more joy than sadness.

Regards,

All of us at Armstrong Veterinary Clinic