



Sara Fletcher, DVM

Dr. Sara Fletcher is from Greensboro. She graduated from Page High School in 1995, and received degrees in Animal Science and Zoology from North Carolina State in 1999. She graduated with the class of 2003 at the North Carolina State College of Veterinary Medicine. Her first nine years of practice were spent in emergency medicine. She has been practicing mobile end-of-life care with Lap of Love Veterinary Hospice & In-Home Euthanasia since 2012. She lives in downtown Greensboro with her husband Jeremy, their daughter Millie, two dogs Buster Brown and Bearey, plus two cats Tulip & Violet.

VETERINARY HOSPICE: *Caring Beyond A Cure*

Veterinary Hospice is a family centered, medically supervised, team oriented service dedicated to preserving the Human-Animal Bond (HAB) by maintaining comfort and Quality of Life (QOL) for the terminally ill or chronically ill patient until the patient passes away unassisted or the family elects peaceful euthanasia, usually performed in the home.

This specific type of veterinary care focuses on the comfort of your pet, not on curing the disease. Hospice is not about prolonging suffering or increasing medical expenses. It is about caring beyond a cure.

Veterinary Hospice is not a place where you take your pet and leave them, the only place involved is the comfort of their own home surrounded by what and whom they love. Hospice is not Anti-Euthanasia, it is Pro-Quality of Life. Hospice veterinarians follow a medical model similar to human hospice; the primary difference is our ability to end the suffering of our animals when the time is appropriate.

An in-home veterinary hospice visit provides the family with the tools and support needed to navigate end-of-life care. This usually occurs after the family's veterinarian reaches a diagnosis, options are discussed and nothing more will be done. However there is something more that can be done by a hospice veterinarian; caring beyond a cure - keeping your baby comfortable until the time is right to say goodbye. Veterinary hospice is not geared towards treating or curing a disease, it is about managing the symptoms and providing comfort.

One of the most important things a hospice veterinarian does is the in-home observation and exam. We spend about an hour observing and learning about your pet and discussing behavior, changes or other issues that you may face in the end stage of life. This consult includes advice, tips and resources to help maintain a better quality of life for your friend and the rest of your family. We will assist you in implementing a plan that will meet your pet's needs and respect your family's wishes. Because we are in the pet's most comfortable environment, we can observe them while they are completely at ease. We may be able to point out small things, like a pet's hesitation to drink water on a slippery tile floor, and help you make necessary changes to ensure your pet stays hydrated.

Hospice veterinarians provide education about the condition your pet has been diagnosed with, and how this disease process will progress, and what the early, advanced and end-stages will look like.

Most end-of-life diseases can be classified as imminent (critical stages or a crisis may occur at any moment), intermediate (transitioning to end-of-life stages), or non-imminent (end-of-life is somewhat distant in the future).

Examples of imminent diseases are osteosarcoma (bone cancer) or hemangiosarcoma (usually a tumor on the spleen or heart base). Examples of intermediate diseases are chronic renal failure, lymphoma and nasal tumors. Non-imminent diseases are conditions like arthritis, degenerative muscular diseases and many types of cancer. Often times with imminent diseases, owners that are not yet ready to say goodbye are faced with the possibility of a crisis situation. We often leave emergency pain injections in case that crisis does occur so that the pet will be more comfortable in the time it takes to get to the emergency clinic, regular vet or have the hospice veterinarian return to the home for a peaceful euthanasia. This is also an option for some pets with intermediate and non-imminent conditions, however most cases do well on a new pain-management protocol prescribed by the hospice veterinarian or palliative therapy like subcutaneous fluids. Palliative therapy is specific for the condition. Hospice veterinarians help implement a care plan for your pet, educate clients about pain recognition and treatment, help with supplementary nutrition guidelines, management of incontinence and assist with bandage or wound care.

Hospice veterinarians are tasked with helping to determine a pet's QOL and with finding out what is important to the family. Specifically, we address what concerns the family shares about the end-of-life process, what they are afraid of happening and how they would like to say goodbye. Additionally, we provide support before, during and after the loss of a pet. In Greensboro, **Lap of Love** began providing a support group for those dealing with end-of-life care issues and pet loss. Our group is called the **Pet Life & Loss Support Group of the Piedmont** and it is completely free. We are a panel of industry professionals: an end-of-life care veterinarian, an animal chaplain, a grief recovery specialist and bereavement director. This group meets on the **first and third Tuesday of every month at 6:30pm**. More details are available online on our Meetup site: www.meetup.com/Pet-Life-Loss-Support-Group-of-the-Piedmont or by calling Ron Grillo at 336-686-6806.



One of the most important roles of a hospice veterinarian is to help you in evaluating your pet's QOL. **Lap of Love** has created a free, interactive scale that weighs the typical factors we use to judge a pet's QOL - like hunger or mobility - differently according to their condition. You can even upload pictures of your pet and videos that you can later use for comparison. This can be very helpful in many situations as making the decision to euthanize is not a simple one. You can find this free tool online at: www.pethospicejournal.com.



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