



John Wehe, DVM
Downtown Greensboro
Animal Hospital

Dr. John Wehe is a Greensboro native. He is owner and veterinarian of Downtown Greensboro Animal Hospital, an animal hospital in downtown that opened in March 2013. Dr. Wehe attended North Carolina State University College of Veterinary Medicine and received his Doctorate of Veterinary Medicine in 2007. His professional interests include small animal medicine, surgery and ultrasonography. He values serving his patients and educating his clients, as well as getting to spend time downtown. Dr. Wehe shares his life with his amazing wife and four children.

PET LOSS...

A Time for Building

If you have ever had to euthanize a pet, you know it can be a painful process. Whether it is an older pet that lived a full life or a young animal whose life was too short, the loss hurts. Euthanasia is intended to heal animal suffering and it is one way in which veterinarians give back to the pets that have given us so much. It may not seem natural, but it is one way in which we serve our clients and help to strengthen the human-animal bond. I often hear the statement, from pet owners prior to a euthanasia, that this must be “the hardest part of my job”. It can be difficult and, at times, very upsetting. There are times it takes my staff and me a while to regroup before we can move on with our workday. One week, this past September, was a particularly tough week for our hospital. We experienced six scheduled euthanasias. Three of them occurred in one day. This is something I hope to never repeat. That week became increasingly difficult for myself and my staff. We shared in the loss of pets we had grown close to over several years, as well as pets we had tried desperately to treat through chronic illness but, ultimately, lost the fight. There were also new clients/pets to our hospital. Throughout the week, I became weary and frustrated with the number of euthanasia appointments. This was something I had not experienced before and lead me to wonder if this was compassion fatigue, or dissatisfaction/frustration with my own limitations as a veterinarian, or possibly this was just a natural human reaction to a difficult time.

I don't know what it was completely, but ultimately time and reflection allowed me to remember that, simply, death can be hard.

Preparing for this article has lead me back to two resources. First, as a new graduate from veterinary school, I made a pledge to the profession called the Hippocratic Oath. Part of the oath reads “... I solemnly swear to use my scientific knowledge and skills for the benefit of society through the protection of animal health and the welfare, the prevention and relief of animal suffering...” The second is The Argus Institute, a grief counseling program at Colorado State University Veterinary School. Their mission reads “honoring the human-animal bond by providing compassionate support and advocacy for people who care for animals.” By the Hippocratic Oath, euthanasia is one duty as a veterinarian we could perform to help to relieve animal suffering. As noted by the Argus Institute, euthanasia is a form of compassion through which we strengthen the powerful human-animal bond. It is out of caring for our clients and their pets that we take on this heavy responsibility. It is through honest discussion about the quality of life of a pet, assessed by our medical expertise, that we help guide owners through the difficult and, often, painful decision to end the suffering of their pet through euthanasia. It is with great care and respect that we perform this service for our clients.

Finally, it is with compassion and sorrow for the loss that we all experience that we engage each other. We acknowledge the pain and remember the unconditional love that we received from our pets, and in doing so build relationships. Relationships are one of life's greatest gifts. Something we were created for. I have found that, being a small animal veterinarian, I am blessed with many wonderful relationships with my clients and their pets. My hope is that these are long term relationships. It is easy to build relationships through sharing the joy that comes with new pet ownership or the pride in seeing someone's pet's health flourish. Other times, that joy may be replaced by stress and sadness in caring for a pet with an illness, or caring for a client through the pain in saying goodbye to a beloved pet. Relationship building at these times can be much more challenging, but equally or even more rewarding, for both the veterinary team and the pet owner, as well as, strengthening the human-animal bond. Euthanasia is one of the hardest parts of my job. Loss of life is painful and it affects everyone involved. However, I have found that, in these tender moments, sometimes we do the most to create lasting relationships and truly foster the human-animal bond.



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DOWNTOWN GREENSBORO ANIMAL HOSPITAL

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