

How to deliver a quality of life consultation

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Introduction

The delivery of a quality of life (QOL) consultation is a vital aspect of hospice care in the veterinary practice and is often implemented as patients approach euthanasia. This paper aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the components involved in delivering a comprehensive QOL consultation. A systematic approach to QOL assessments can profoundly impact the wellbeing of both the patient and their human caregivers, offering clarity, compassion, and direction during an emotionally challenging time. This paper is based on a 20-minute presentation intended to provide veterinary professionals with the tools necessary to perform meaningful QOL assessments that align with the hospice philosophy.

Importance of quality of life consultations in hospice care

A QOL consultation in hospice care is essential for providing families with the education, tools and resources required to determine their pet's physical, emotional, and psychological well-being as they near the end of their life. It can identify areas where further care or intervention is needed, ensuring that pain, anxiety, and discomfort are adequately managed. Additionally, QOL consultations help guide discussions around euthanasia, allowing families and care teams to make decisions that align with the patient's comfort and dignity.

The hospice philosophy, which emphasises comfort, compassionate care, and respecting the patient's emotional wellbeing, forms the foundation of QOL consultations. By incorporating this philosophy into the assessment, veterinary professionals can provide a framework for discussing not only physical health but also emotional and psychological comfort during the dying process.

Key components of a QOL consultation

Introduction to QOL assessments

Understanding the role of QOL assessments is essential for addressing gaps in caring for terminally ill patients (hospice care). A QOL assessment involves gathering information on the patient's overall condition, including pain levels and overall quality of life as well as identifying and addressing the challenges the family may be facing. This helps the care team and family understand the patient's experience and inform decisions regarding the timing of euthanasia and other interventions.

Overview of the hospice philosophy

The hospice philosophy aims to provide a family centered, collaborative approach to hospice care and euthanasia. The focus shifts to quality of life over quantity of time. A QOL consultation is designed not only to assess physical health but also to take into account the emotional well-being of the patient and their family. A key element is helping families prepare emotionally for the loss while ensuring the animal's dignity and comfort.

Components of an effective QOL consultation

An effective QOL consultation includes compassionate communication, empathy, and clear guidance about monitoring comfort and QOL. Veterinary professionals should ask open-ended questions, use pain scales, observe patient behavior, and provide emotional support to both the patient and their family. These consultations

require skillful and compassionate communication, balancing the need to provide honest, sensitive information with the goal of supporting families during a difficult time.

Addressing the NZVA and NZVNA priorities

The delivery of QOL consultations in veterinary hospice care aligns with several of the strategic priorities, particularly in the areas of workforce sustainability and advocacy and communication. Offering ongoing education and support for veterinary professionals in this field enhances workforce sustainability by ensuring veterinarians are well-equipped to handle complex, sensitive cases.

Furthermore, promoting the practice of QOL consultations advances advocacy by encouraging better communication, care and support for patients and their families and broader public education about the importance of hospice care.

This process also highlights the connection between One Health principles and veterinary medicine. QOL consultations not only impact the well-being of patients, they indirectly affect the families that love them, reinforcing the interconnectedness of animal, human, and emotional health. Moreover, an emphasis on compassionate hospice care and peaceful euthanasia contributes to public confidence in veterinarians and enhances advocacy for the veterinary profession.

Conclusion

Quality of life consultations are an essential component of hospice care, providing families with the tools, education and resources required to both assess and address the comfort and quality of life of their beloved pet. By understanding the components and philosophy behind these consultations, veterinary professionals can offer a higher standard of care for terminally ill patients and their families. As this field continues to grow, so too does the need for proper training and education in hospice care and peaceful euthanasia techniques to ensure that the workforce remains equipped to meet the evolving needs of the patients and families they serve.