

TRANSITIONS PET CARE

What is Hospice?

Generally, most people understand that hospice is not a place (as in a hospital or nursing home), but rather a philosophy of care where a patient, be it animal or human, is experiencing old age or terminal illness where curative measures have been stopped and comfort care is given until the time of death. However, when you get down to the nitty-gritty details, the definition of hospice can vary quite widely. Some say that the patient must have been given a terminal diagnosis and perhaps have only 3 to 6 months to live. Some say it's just the period right before death as in the last few days. And yet others say it's the period when caregiving begins, which can be many years prior to death, etc. And, what is or isn't exactly "curative," and how do those measures differ from "comfort care"?

What Hospice Means to Me...

Perhaps the best definition I personally can give is what animal hospice signifies for me. To me it is about honoring these sentient beings (and their human companions!) with our love and caring through providing comfort and supportive healing at every stage of the animal's life journey. Comfort care can come through pain management and easing of symptoms, while still all the while supporting healing and wellbeing whether it be on a physical, energetic or emotional level! To my mind the animal is supported as a living being through a holistic approach all the way through till the moment of death. And even then, I believe there's much we can do to honor our animal companions since the bonds that tie us do not disappear with the animal's last breath.

What About Euthanasia?

When speaking of hospice with animals, the concept of euthanasia—as opposed to natural death—creates a grey area on how hospice fits in with these two opposing ends of the spectrum. If you follow through on the definition to support health and life through till the moment of death, hospice care usually culminates in a natural death (with life neither hastened, nor unnecessarily prolonged). However the world we live and die in isn't perfect and most animal hospice professionals agree euthanasia is a valid option when offered with love as the kindest choice, especially when all palliative alternatives (providing relief without dealing with the underlying cause) have failed, or due to personal beliefs and other human circumstances that call for this option.

Not surprisingly, my clients who end up choosing euthanasia often have never previously experienced a death firsthand, and thus were less familiar and comfortable with the natural dying process and the concepts of hospice. Cultural pressures and the support or lack thereof of the client's veterinarian or an animal hospice professional through the end-of-life process, usually plays a role on the chosen outcome as well. We're not quite yet a society that naturally embraces or simply has the time for the often intense caregiving of its elderly, nor are comfortable with the topics of death and dying let alone the reality of the process as presented via our own human or animal experiences.

What Role Do I Play?

My hope is to help you through this emotionally and physically demanding time. In fact, do not be surprised that in coping with your own animal's death you may have more profound emotional feelings than what you may have previously experienced with a human family member. I highly recommend that you seek out support, as you would with your own human family. You will quickly find how much easier the process is once you have the support you need to enable you to be at your best—to do so, you must take care of yourself and allow others to help you.

My philosophy is to support you and your animal through this process with various caregiving needs and tasks, provide tips and information to supplement your veterinarian's guidance, as well as to support you in whatever your personal philosophy of care is for this end-of-life transition. In addition to in-home "nursing" care, I can stay with your pet to provide you with some respite so you can rest and rejuvenate, as well as just be a sounding board for emotional support. Though it can be a poignant time, if approached with an open heart it can also be a beautiful gift and the most rewarding of experiences to care for your beloved animal through to their final breath.

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For more information about my services, please contact me as follows, or view additional pages of my website:

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