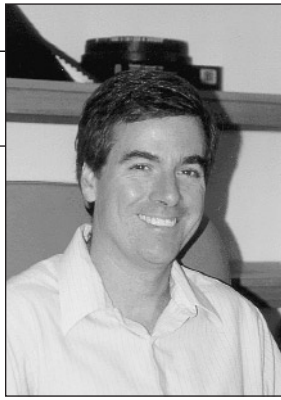


Changing protocols surrounding euthanasia



John Tait

An unwritten rule has existed among veterinary practitioners for years that the 2 most important interactions clients will have with their veterinarian are their first visit, where they form their first impression of the veterinarian, and their last visit, which is often when euthanasia is performed.

Whether the veterinarian travels to the client or the client to the veterinarian, euthanasia is an irreversible procedure for the animal and, most often, a very emotional time for the client, because of the sense of sudden loss, added to by the uncertainty around the event, which can be anxiety-inducing, frustrating, guilt ridden, and without closure, if not handled empathetically and in a timely fashion by the veterinarian.

It has been determined that empathy is one of the top 5 qualities by which clients judge their service provider (1), and that conveyed empathy facilitates closure for the client. Nowhere is empathy more important for a client than during the stressful time of pet loss. As might be expected, many veterinarians are attracted into the profession in the first place for the very reason that they are extremely empathetic to animals and animal owners; therefore, acts of empathy come naturally.

The bond between veterinarian and client is greatly augmented when reassurance and closure are reinforced for clients at 2 points in time: during the euthanasia procedure and as a follow-up after the client leaves the hospital (Cindy Adams, personal communication). Besides showing that empathy to clients during the procedure, veterinarians who more successfully strengthen the client-veterinarian bond are those who can convey that empathy to the clients after completion of the actual euthanasia by means of some sort of a follow-up approach. Why is the post-euthanasia follow-up message from the veterinarian important? Because, according to Dr. Adams, for clients, the follow-up item or message, in whatever form it presents itself, reinforces the closure and is symbolic of the process surrounding the death of their animal being completed, often controlled by the

L'évolution des protocoles entourant l'euthanasie

Les praticiens considèrent depuis des années que les deux plus importantes interactions entre les clients et les vétérinaires se déroulent lors de la première rencontre, celle où le client se forme une opinion du vétérinaire, et la dernière rencontre, où, souvent, un animal est euthanasié.

Que le vétérinaire se rende chez le client ou que ce soit le contraire, l'euthanasie est un acte définitif; très souvent, la charge émotive est lourde pour le client, à cause de la perte qu'il subit, mais aussi de l'incertitude qui entoure l'événement, qui peut causer de l'angoisse, de la frustration et de la culpabilité, et qui peut laisser un vide si le vétérinaire ne manifeste pas d'empathie.

Il a été établi que l'empathie compte parmi les cinq grandes qualités que le client recherche chez son vétérinaire (1), et que cette empathie l'aide à faire son deuil. À aucun moment l'empathie n'est plus importante que lorsque le client perd son compagnon. Naturellement, beaucoup de vétérinaires ont été attirés vers la profession par le fait qu'ils ont beaucoup d'empathie pour les animaux et leurs propriétaires. Par conséquent, les gestes d'empathie leur viennent spontanément.

Le lien qui unit le vétérinaire et le client se resserre quand le premier rassure le client et l'aide à faire son deuil à deux moments particuliers : pendant l'euthanasie et après que le client est rentré chez lui (Cindy Adams, communication personnelle). En plus de montrer de l'empathie pendant l'euthanasie, le vétérinaire qui réussit à resserrer les liens avec ses clients est celui qui leur démontre de l'empathie après l'euthanasie, en assurant une forme de suivi. Pourquoi ce suivi est-il important? Parce que, selon la D^{re} Adams, peu importe la forme qu'il prend, il aide les clients à vivre leur deuil et il souligne l'accomplissement du processus entourant la mort de leur animal, processus dont le vétérinaire est responsable, puisque c'est lui qui veille au transport et à la crémation de l'animal.

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veterinarian through having the animal removed from the hospital and transported for cremation.

Veterinarians typically manage the euthanasia experience well, through dedicated booking times, extended end-of-day appointments, post-euthanasia viewings, and premedication of patients and preplacement of catheters, etc. to facilitate uncomplicated euthanasias. Many veterinarians have adopted their own individual styles of follow-up that may include such steps as communication with clients through phone calls, sympathy cards and plaques, flowers, letters, etc. To assist veterinarians with their follow-up and clients with their closure, items of condolence are and have been available for a number of years.

As much as a follow-up is important for the client and client-veterinarian bond, the timeliness of that follow-up is just as important. Clients who do not receive timely closure or for whom items, such as private cremation ashes, are not delivered when promised can quickly become angered during this sensitive time, thereby negating any goodwill for the hospital.

Veterinary affiliated service providers responsible for performing cremations and removing cadavers from veterinary hospitals are recognizing that they can assist veterinarians and their grieving clients, and simultaneously enhance their own business, by providing follow-up services to both veterinarians and clients. One company that I know of has augmented the mechanical services of transportation and private or group cremations, which, traditionally, have been provided to veterinarians, with a number of innovative services and products. The founder of this company recognized a need for grieving pet owners when, much to his frustration, he waited a month for his deceased dog's ashes to be returned from a private cremation.

Apart from providing the traditional cremation and 2-way transportation of cadavers and ashes, this company provides clients with a tastefully arranged facility where they can personally transport or visit their deceased pets (including horses) privately prior to their cremation, participate in the cremation process, retrieve items such as collars, and choose from a number of traditional and technologically innovative mementos that can be emblazoned with everything from names to personal pictures. Clients, or their veterinarians wishing to send a memento to a client, who do not wish to visit the facility personally can choose personalized items conveniently over the Internet.

Since the inception of these services, the significance of the human-animal bond has become very apparent to this company through its experiences with clients that include everything from processions complete with pallbearers and caskets, to client assisted euthanasias for private cremations. Regardless of the approach chosen by clients, their closure is complete, and on a timeline generally set to satisfy themselves. As one recent client stated, "I felt I followed my pet all the way to the end and felt comforted by the way everything was handled."

While these types of services are not pursued by all pet owners, they do offer veterinarians an increasingly valuable option for satisfying clients.

En général, les vétérinaires s'acquittent bien de l'euthanasie, en prévoyant des rendez-vous prolongés à la fin de la journée, en permettant aux clients de rester un peu avec l'animal après l'euthanasie, en administrant des médicaments et en installant un cathéter pour éviter les complications. Beaucoup de vétérinaires ont adopté un mode particulier de suivi qui peut inclure une communication téléphonique avec le client, ou l'envoi d'un message de sympathie, de fleurs ou d'une lettre. Pour aider les vétérinaires à assurer leur suivi et les clients à vivre leur deuil, divers produits sont proposés sur le marché et ce, depuis plusieurs années.

Le suivi est important pour le client et pour le lien qui existe entre ce dernier et le vétérinaire, mais le moment où ce suivi a lieu est tout aussi important. Les clients qui ne reçoivent pas à temps le suivi nécessaire ou les cendres de leur animal risquent de ressentir de la colère pendant cette période chargée d'émotion, et de prendre la clinique en grippe.

Les fournisseurs des vétérinaires qui s'occupent de la prise en charge des cadavres et de leur crémation reconnaissent qu'ils peuvent aider les vétérinaires et leurs clients, tout en faisant la promotion de leurs propres services, en assurant un suivi auprès des vétérinaires et des clients. Une entreprise de ma connaissance a rehaussé les services de transport et de crémation individuelle et commune qui sont généralement offerts par les vétérinaires, en y ajoutant quelques services et produits novateurs. Le fondateur de l'entreprise a fait l'expérience de la douleur que les clients ressentent lorsque, à sa grande frustration, il a dû attendre un mois complet avant de recevoir les cendres de son chien, après une crémation privée.

En plus d'offrir les services traditionnels de crémation et de transport des cadavres et des cendres, l'entreprise propose aux clients des installations de bon goût où ils peuvent eux-mêmes emmener les cendres de leur animal ou venir voir leur animal (y compris les chevaux) avant sa crémation, assister à la crémation, récupérer des objets comme le collier de l'animal, et choisir un souvenir, traditionnel ou non, sur lequel peut être apposé le nom de l'animal ou une photo, par exemple. Les clients, ou les vétérinaires qui souhaitent envoyer un souvenir à ces derniers, qui ne veulent pas se rendre aux installations en question peuvent choisir des articles personnalisés dans le Web.

Depuis la création de ces services, l'importance du lien qui existe entre les humains et les animaux est devenue plus évidente pour cette entreprise, comme en témoignent certaines expériences avec des clients, incluant des cortèges funéraires avec porteurs et cercueil, ainsi que l'euthanasie et la crémation privées en présence des clients. Peu importe ce que choisit le client, il peut vivre son deuil de façon opportune. Un client a récemment déclaré : «J'ai eu le sentiment d'accompagner mon animal jusqu'au bout, et je me suis senti réconforté par la façon dont les choses se sont déroulées.»

Bien que tous les clients ne demandent pas ce type de services, les vétérinaires disposent là d'un autre moyen de satisfaire leurs clients.

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BOOK REVIEW



COMPTE RENDU DE LIVRE

Revue Scientifique et Technique: Diseases of poultry: World trade and public health implications. Office International des Épizooties, Paris, 2000, ISBN 92-9044-516-5.

Production of this excellent paperback volume was coordinated by 2 prominent experts in poultry health, and the authors are authorities on the various diseases. The book contains 17 chapters; each gives up-to-date information on a disease or group of diseases considered to be particularly important in international trade. In addition, information is given on the public health significance of each disease. The final chapter on ostrich diseases contains valuable information on pathogens that are of concern in that species or may spread between ostriches and chickens. The book will be particularly appreciated by veterinarians and other professionals who must make decisions on the movement of eggs and poultry within their countries and across international borders, but it will also benefit anyone seeking information on poultry diseases of major importance. All chapters are written in English, with summaries in French and Spanish. The chapter on infectious bursal disease is given in both French and English. Ample references are given for each chapter.

Food-borne infections are dealt with in chapters on paratyphoid *Salmonella* and *Campylobacter* spp. The devastating effects that inappropriate disease control legislation can have on the poultry industry is discussed in the chapter on *Salmonella*. This chapter also includes useful information on public health implications arising from the use of antibiotics by the poultry and food animal industries. The chapter on campylobacteriosis indicates that the prevalence of infection with *Campylobacter jejuni* in broiler flocks in various poultry producing countries ranges from 17% to 90%. Campylobacteriosis

has been regarded as an occupational infection of poultry plant workers, and it is noted that outbreaks resulting in death have occurred in abattoir workers. Another concern is that autoimmune conditions may follow infections. Again, useful information is given on antibiotic resistance to the pathogen.

Fowl typhoid and pullorum disease are important diseases of poultry but of minimal public health concern. They have been eradicated from commercial operations in the United Kingdom and North America. Since the diseases are rarely seen, readers will find the series of color photographs of pullorum disease particularly useful.

Both Newcastle disease and highly pathogenic avian influenza viruses are included in list A of the Office International des Épizooties, and the chapters on these diseases contain ample information related to their prevention and control worldwide. Color photographs show some of the important gross and histological lesions of highly pathogenic avian influenza. Readers will find the comments on human health implications helpful for addressing public concerns.

The final chapter on ostrich diseases, alone, would make the book worth having. Information presented on Crimean-Congo hemorrhagic fever, spongiform encephalopathy, and anthrax, as it relates to ostriches, is of public health significance and should interest many readers. In short, I strongly recommend this text for those with an interest in controlling poultry diseases and in preventing zoonotic infections.

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