**Anticipatory Grief**

Caring for a terminally ill or geriatric pet can be challenging. It often involves special care routines, frequent veterinary visits and intense worry. Even worse is the knowledge that the time you have left with your beloved pet is limited. You may find yourself hoping for a natural death or the “perfect” death.

Many pet owners experience anticipatory grief at this stage in their pet’s life. Anticipatory grief occurs prior to the actual loss of the pet and consists of a range of emotions including fear, guilt, frustration over lack of information and anxiety. Anxiety surrounding the anticipation of death is normal, but allowing the anxiety to overwhelm you can be detrimental to enjoying the remaining time you have with your pet.

The best way to deal with anticipatory grief and help your pet is to be prepared for this stage of life. Please ask yourself the following questions:

** How do I envision the last few moments of my pet's life?**

Where do I want it to take place? Who should be present? Is there anything I don’t want to happen?

** How do I feel about euthanasia?**

Do I understand the process? Do I have questions I need to ask my vet?

** What can I do right now so that 6 months from now, I will look back at this time and think “this was the perfect passing?” and “I have no regrets?”**

Are there any “bucket list” items I want to experience with my pet? What can I do to make my pet feel extra special?

While it’s extremely difficult to face the prospect of life without your pet, answering these questions will help you when your pet’s time draws near. Your thoughtful advanced planning will help alleviate your anxiety so you can focus on providing your pet with compassionate physical care. Making your pet’s last days extra special with lots of love, favorite toys, activities, food, etc. may ease your grieving heart as well.