Nursing Care for Hospice Pets

PAIN

Recognition and control of pain are arguably the most important part of hospice care. Pain can affect all of the following concerns.

Our pets can make it tricky to know when they are in pain, but there are some signs that will tip you off to their discomfort, and it often is not crying out or whining as we might assume. Signs include:

* Heavy panting
* Pacing
* Whining
* Growling
* Lying in an abnormal posture
* Lying in an abnormal location
* Decreased appetite
* Withdrawal from family (human and/or other pets)

APPETITE

Appetite can decrease considerably in hospice pets. This is a normal occurrence as many diseases progress. Our goal at this point is not to maintain the ideal balanced diet of her younger years, but to provide energy. Suggestions for encouraging eating:

* Offer special favorites (perhaps treats, or cooked chicken or deli ham…)
* Offer novel foods (baby food, ground beef, Vienna sausages).
* Warmed food may appeal to some pets more than cold or room temperature meals.
* Offering food by hand may encourage pet to eat
* Feed at varying times a day. Notice if there is any pattern to her preferences that may help you offer food when she is most likely to want it.
* Offer food in different locations of you home. Bringing food closer to a pet that struggles with mobility may improve consumption a great deal. Sometimes it is too hard to go to the kitchen, so she just doesn’t eat.

HYDRATION

Many pets also become less interested in drinking water as their disease progresses. This is also normal.

While you never want to force water (or any other liquid) down your pet’s throat, you can try the following:

* Try low sodium chicken broth
* Use a syringe to put a small amount of water on the tongue. Sometimes this encourages a little drinking.
* Continue to dampen the mouth even into the later stages of the process to help maintain comfort.
* Hydration of the eyes is sometimes forgotten, but can go a long way towards keeping your pet comfortable. Artificial tears/eye lubricants can be provided.

MOBILITY

The ability to move without slipping or falling is a big component of your pet’s quality of life. Medications to ease pain are often a big part of the plan, as are some modifications you can make to help them along.

* Non slip rugs or yoga mats can provide better footing.
* Ramps can help avoid the difficulties of the steps going in or out of your home.
* A sling can help you help your pet to rise and lessens pressure on the back legs. I have been very impressed with Ginger Leads.

[www.gingerleads.com](http://www.gingerleads.com)

They time will come when medicines and external assistance will no longer work, and your pet will be unable to stand. This is very stressful for your pet, and you may notice signs of increased anxiety (whining, heavy panting). Without intervention, these pets will develop bed sores, urine scalding, infections and may eventually have trouble breathing.

HYGEINE

As disease progresses or our pets advance in age, loss of control of urination and defecation can be a normal event. Keeping them clean and dry is very important. Otherwise sores, urine scalding and infections can develop.

* Shave the areas that are becoming soiled. This makes it much easier to keep their skin clean and dry.
* Baby powder or diaper cream can be helpful in keeping the skin protected.
* Use bedding that can be easily cleaned and changed. Waterproof bedding from baby stores, mattress covers, disposable pads.

HAPPINESS

You know your pet better than anyone else!

You are best able to judge his happiness and quality of life. You know what things loves to do. You know how he likes to interact with his family. When you sit quietly with him, you know if he is content or if he is struggling. Trust your instincts.