



From Diagnosis to Comfort:
Hospice and Palliative
Oncology in Veterinary
Practice

Dr. Melissa L. Miller, Practice Limited to
Oncology, Pet-Loss Grief Support Specialist ©

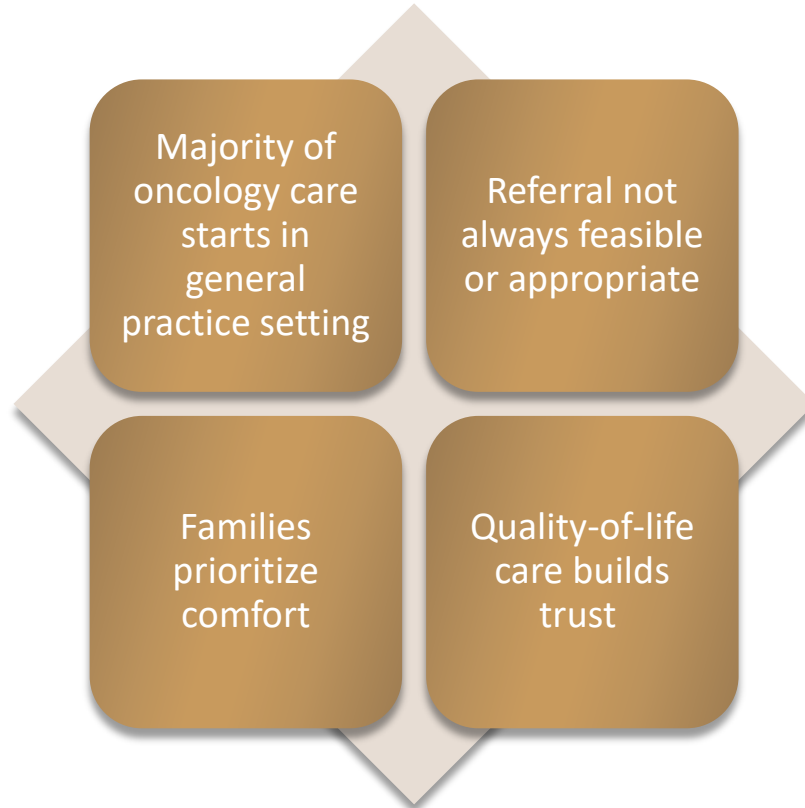
April 26th, 2026



Objectives

- Define palliative vs. hospice care
- Understand goals of palliative and hospice care in veterinary patients
- Recognize when to shift from curative therapy to comfort care
- Improve client communication and decision-making

Why is This Important?



Palliative vs. Hospice Care

Palliative Care

- Symptom management
- Can occur at any disease stage
- May be concurrent with curative therapy

Hospice Care

- End-of-life care when curative therapy is no longer appropriate
- Focus points
 - Comfort
 - Dignity
 - Overall quality of life

Role of the Veterinary Team

- Integration of palliative care early in therapy process
 - At diagnosis of incurable disease
 - When treatment is declined
 - When side effects outweigh benefits
- Ongoing monitoring plans and adjustments to therapy
- Educating clients on expectations
- Emotional support for the family
- Coordination with specialists

Common Oncology Indications

- Advanced or metastatic cancer
- Non-responsive or relapsed cancers
- Financial limitations
- Logistical challenges for therapy
- Declining quality of life

Common Cancers for Palliative Care

- Osteosarcoma
 - Not amputation candidate
- Splenic Mass
 - Not splenectomy candidate
- Oral cancers
 - Dogs – melanoma most common
 - Cats – squamous cell carcinoma most common
- Lymphoma
 - No chemotherapy
 - Steroids potentially contraindicated
- Metastatic cancer
- Relapsed cancer (with or without metastasis)

Goals of Care

- Minimize pain
- Maintain mobility
- Encourage interactions with family
- Maintain adequate nutrition
- Support the human-animal bond
- Enable a peaceful end-of-life

Quality of Life Assessment

Appetite

Hydration

Mobility and
activity levels

Pain scores

Hygiene and
continence

Interactions
and behaviors
with family

Quality of Life Scales

- Lap of Love

- <https://www.lapoflove.com/how-will-i-know-it-is-time/lap-of-love-quality-of-life-scale.pdf>

Lap of Love Pet Family Concerns

**SCORE EACH ITEM
ON A SCALE OF 0-2:**

0 = I am not concerned at this time
1 = There is some concern
2 = I am concerned about this

I AM CONCERNED ABOUT THE FOLLOWING THINGS:

<input type="checkbox"/> Pet suffering	<input type="checkbox"/> Desire to perform nursing care for your pet
<input type="checkbox"/> Pet dying alone	<input type="checkbox"/> Ability to perform nursing care for your pet
<input type="checkbox"/> Not knowing the right time to euthanize	<input type="checkbox"/> Coping with loss
<input type="checkbox"/> Concern for other household animals	<input type="checkbox"/> Concern for other members of the family (i.e., children)

RESULTS

Total score

0-4: Your concerns are minimal at this time. You may understand what lies ahead from the passing of a previous pet, or you may not want to face the inevitable loss of your pet. As difficult as it is to consider these things, now is the time to evaluate your concerns and limitations.

5-9: Your concerns are mounting. Prepare for the changes ahead by educating yourself on your pet's condition. Consult your veterinarian and ask if they can recommend reputable online sources of information.

10-16: Your concerns about the changes in your pet are valid. Remember to value your quality of life as a caregiver, too. Now is the time to build a support system around you. Veterinary guidance will help you prepare for the medical changes in your pet while counselors and other health professionals can help you with anticipatory grief.

DISCUSS THE QUESTIONS BELOW, AND THE ENTIRE QUALITY-OF-LIFE SCALE, WITH YOUR VETERINARIAN

Below are some open-ended questions that help gauge your family's time, emotional, and (when appropriate) financial budgets:

- Have you ever been through the loss of a pet before? If so, what was your experience (good or bad, and why)?
- What do you hope the life expectancy of your pet will be? What do you think it will be?
- What is the ideal situation you wish for your pet's end-of-life experience? (at home, pass away in her sleep, etc.)

Suggestions on using this quality-of-life scale:

- Complete the scale at different times of the day, note circadian fluctuations in well-being. (We find most pets tend to do better during the day and worse at night.)
- Request multiple members of the family complete the scale; compare observations.
- Take periodic photos of your pet to help you remember their physical appearance.

Resources:

1. AAHA/AAFP Pain Management Guidelines for Dogs and Cats, www.aahanet.org/Library/PainMgmt.aspx

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Our dedicated Support Center is available 7:00 am - 11:00 pm ET, every day, including weekends and holidays. Contact us at (855) 933-5683 or LapofLove.com

Lap of Love Pet Quality-of-Life Scale

When evaluating the quality of life of your pet, personalized patient and family information is important when reaching an educated, informed, and supported choice that fits not only your pet's medical condition, but also your wishes and expectations. In short, quality of life applies not only to the pet, it also applies to you!

**SCORE EACH SUBSECTION
ON A SCALE OF 0-2:**

0 = agree with statement (describes my pet)
1 = some changes seen
2 = disagree with statement (does not describe my pet)

<p>SOCIAL FUNCTIONS</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Desire to be with the family has not changed</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Interacts normally with family or other pets (i.e., no increased aggression or other changes)</p> <p>MENTAL HEALTH</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Enjoys normal play activities</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Still dislikes the same thing (i.e., still hates the mailman = 0, or doesn't bark at the mailman anymore = 2)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No outward signs of stress or anxiety</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Does not seem confused or apathetic</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Nighttime activity is normal, no changes seen</p> <p>RESULTS</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Total score added from each section</p> <p>0-8: Quality of life is most likely adequate. No medical intervention required yet, but guidance from your veterinarian may help you identify signs to look for in the future.</p> <p>9-16: Quality of life is questionable and medical intervention is suggested. Your pet would certainly benefit from veterinary oversight and guidance to evaluate the disease process he/she is experiencing.</p> <p>17-32: Quality of life is a definite concern. Changes will likely become more progressive and more severe in the near future. Veterinary guidance will help you better understand the end stages of your pet's disease process in order to make a more informed decision of whether to continue hospice care or elect peaceful euthanasia.</p>	<p>HEALTH</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No changes in breathing or panting patterns</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No outward signs of pain (excessive panting, pacing, and whining are most commonly seen)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No pacing around the house</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> My pet's overall condition has not changed recently</p> <p>NATURAL FUNCTIONS</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Appetite has stayed the same</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Drinking has stayed the same</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Normal urination habits</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Normal bowel movement habits</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Ability to ambulate (walk around) has stayed the same</p> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>Scan the code or visit Info.LapofLove.com/QLScale to access interactive versions of these tools.</p> <p style="font-size: 8px;"><small>Content may not be reproduced without written consent from Lap of Love Veterinary Hospitals.</small></p>  </div>
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Quality of Life Scales

■ Caring Pathways

- <https://caringpathways.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/QualityofLifeScale.pdf>

■ The HHHHMM Scale

Quality of Life Scale (The HHHHMM Scale)	
Pet caregivers can use this Quality of Life Scale to determine the success of Pawspace care. Score patients using a scale of: 0 to 10 (10 being ideal).	
Score	Criterion
0-10	HURT - Adequate pain control & breathing ability is of top concern. Trouble breathing outweighs all concerns. Is the pet's pain well managed? Can the pet breathe properly? Is oxygen supplementation necessary?
0-10	HUNGER - Is the pet eating enough? Does hand feeding help? Does the pet need a feeding tube?
0-10	HYDRATION - Is the pet dehydrated? For patients not drinking enough water, use subcutaneous fluids daily or twice daily to supplement fluid intake.
0-10	HYGIENE - The pet should be brushed and cleaned, particularly after eliminations. Avoid pressure sores with soft bedding and keep all wounds clean.
0-10	HAPPINESS - Does the pet express joy and interest? Is the pet responsive to family, toys, etc.? Is the pet depressed, lonely, anxious, bored or afraid? Can the pet's bed be moved to be close to family activities?
0-10	MOBILITY - Can the pet get up without assistance? Does the pet need human or mechanical help (e.g., a cart)? Does the pet feel like going for a walk? Is the pet having seizures or stumbling? (Some caregivers feel euthanasia is preferable to amputation, but an animal with limited mobility pet still alert, happy and responsive can have a good quality of life as long as caregivers are committed to helping their pet.)
0-10	MORE GOOD DAYS THAN BAD - When bad days outnumber good days, quality of life might be too compromised. When a healthy human-animal bond is no longer possible, the caregiver must be made aware that the end is near. The decision for euthanasia needs to be made if the pet is suffering. If death comes peacefully and painlessly at home, that is okay.
*TOTAL	*A total over 35 points represents acceptable life quality to continue with pet hospice (Pawspace).
<small>Original concept, Oncology Outlook, by Dr. Alice Villalobos, Quality of Life Scale Helps Make Final Call, VIN, 09/2004; scale format created for author's book, Canine and Feline Geriatric Oncology: Honoring the Human-Animal Bond, Blackwell Publishing, 2007. Revised for the International Veterinary Association of Pain Management (IVAPM) 2011 Palliative Care and Hospice Guidelines. Reprinted with permission from Dr. Alice Villalobos & Wiley-Blackwell.</small>	

Quality of Life Scales

- CodaPet
 - <https://www.codapet.com/quality-of-life-scale>
- Online questionnaire
- Results can be saved for comparison to evaluate trends

Quality of Life Scales

- Euthabag
- <https://www.euthabag.com/pet-quality-of-life-assessment-calculator>
- Brief online questionnaire with score system

Pain Management

- Multimodal drug therapy
 - NSAIDs (or steroids)
 - Opioids (tramadol, codeine, buprenorphine)
 - Gabapentin/amantadine
 - Bisphosphonates
 - Fentanyl patches
 - Local/regional blocks
 - Ketamine injections
- Non-pharmacologic
 - Acupuncture
 - Laser
 - Physical therapy
 - Holistic medicine and supplements

Common Symptom Management

- Pain
 - Analgesic therapy (multimodal)
 - Palliative radiation therapy
- Nausea
 - Maropitant
 - Ondansetron
 - Metoclopramide
- Inappetence
 - Mirtazapine
 - Cyproheptadine
 - Capromorelin
 - Feeding tubes

Common Symptom Management

- Respiratory changes
 - Oxygen therapy
 - Bronchodilators
 - Steroids
- Effusions
 - Diuretics
 - Periodic centesis procedures
 - Pleural ports

Palliative Oncology Treatments

Metronomic chemotherapy

- Oral protocols – treating as chronic disease

Palliative radiation therapy

- Pain control – bone tumors
- Reduction of rapidly growing masses for comfort

Cytoreductive surgery

- Ulcerated/bleeding masses removed for comfort
- Oral masses cytoreduced to aid with comfort and eating

Bisphosphonates

- Bone pain control and strengthening

Transitioning to Hospice Care

- Escalating pain
- Decreased response to medical management
- Frequent emergency situations **

Approach to Hospice Care



Communication Points

- Set realistic expectations with families
- Use clear and compassionate language and tone
- Be open and honest about prognosis
 - Use ranges instead of timelines
- Ensure plan aligns with family's goals and values

Things to Consider

- Balancing the debate of prolonged comfort care vs. suffering
- Family financial limitations
- Emotional burden

End-of-Life Decisions

- Family relays indicators of declining quality of life at home
- Family has prepared and decided they are ready
- Guidance from veterinary team

Supporting Euthanasia

- Normalize that this is a difficult decision
- Reaffirm that euthanasia is an act of compassion
- Avoid personal opinions
- Explain the process clearly



Euthanasia Preparation

- Prepare the family for what to expect
- Discuss options
 - Environment
 - Timing
 - Who will be present
- Be calm and use respectful language
- Allow for privacy and time

Resources

■ Pet loss support

- <https://petloss.com/> (Pet Loss Grief Support, Rainbow Bridge, and Candle Ceremony)
- <https://www.aplb.org/> (Association for Pet Loss and Bereavement)
- <https://www.lapoflove.com/our-services/pet-loss-support> (Lap of Love)
- [https://www.rainbowsbridge.com/grief support center/grief support home.htm](https://www.rainbowsbridge.com/grief-support-center/grief-support-home.htm)
- [https://www.rainbowsbridge.com/grief support center/grief support home.htm](https://www.rainbowsbridge.com/grief-support-center/grief-support-home.htm)
- <https://www.peopleanimalslove.org/>
- <https://fetchacure.org/resource-library/pet-loss-support-group/> (**FETCH-a-Cure – local**)

Discussion/Questions?

Contact our service!

Phone: (804) 206-9122
(option "2)

Email:

oncorva@partnervesc.com

