Hospice & Palliative Care

IOWA VETERINARY SPECIALTIES

24/7 Emergency Hospital
Our Mission

Iowa Veterinary Specialties strives to be at the forefront of hospice and palliative care. Providing innovation, education and access — one patient, one family at a time.
hospice
noun \ˈhäs-pəs\: a facility or program designed to provide a caring environment for meeting the physical and emotional needs of the terminally ill

corrected to "hospice"

palliate
transitive verb \ˈpa-lē-, ət\: to make the effects of something, (such as an illness) less painful, harmful, or harsh

corrected to "palliate"
What Is Hospice and Palliative Care?

The philosophy of Hospice and palliative care is to create a comfortable, caring environment for those who have life-threatening or terminal illnesses. The goal of hospice and palliative care is not to cure the disease. Rather, it is a way to prevent any undue suffering the individual may have from his/her illness.

HISTORY

Hospice care has been around for centuries. Hospice got its start in Europe during the late middle ages. Hospices were set up so that travelers, or those without family, could have a refuge. Eventually, hospice became a refuge not only for travelers, but also for those who were sick or terminally ill. Modern hospice and palliative care did not become what it is today until the 1960s. Hospice did not become a movement in the United States until the 1980s.

HUMAN VS. PET HOSPICE

Pet hospice and palliative care is structured very similar to the way people receive this service. Both human and pet hospice/palliative care share the same goals. At Iowa Veterinary Specialties, our mission is to provide compassionate palliative, end-of-life care for your pet, as well as be a support system for you and your family. We are dedicated to keeping your pet comfortable while maintaining an acceptable quality of life.
Palliative Care vs. Hospice Care

Although similar, there are a few variables that distinguish palliative from hospice care. The level of care that the patient needs is one factor that indicates whether the patient needs palliative or hospice care. Palliative care can be administered alongside curative treatments, or on its own. Palliative care does not necessarily imply that end-of-life care is needed at this point. In fact, many pets undergoing palliative care can live comfortably for many years. Although curing your pet’s condition may not be an option, the symptoms can be reduced by giving palliative care.

Hospice, as it is in humans, is end-of-life management. During this time, your pet’s conditions are monitored more closely as its quality of life decreases. Pain management and other palliative measures are increased to ensure your pet is as comfortable as possible. If the pain becomes unmanageable, it is time to initiate the end-of-life plan implemented and discussed before treatment began.

Through hospice and palliative care, your pet’s quality of life can improve tremendously. Iowa Veterinary Specialties hopes to strengthen the bond between you and your pet. Iowa Veterinary Specialties not only hopes to provide relief from your pet’s physical pain, but also help him maintain a rich, emotional environment his their final moments.
When to Choose Hospice

Where do we Begin?

The process of beginning palliative or hospice care does not follow a specific time-line. It begins with a conversation, usually with your pet’s veterinarian.

Palliative/Hospice Care begins:

- When a decision not to pursue curative treatment is made
- At the diagnosis of a terminal illness
- When symptoms of chronic illness interfere with normal routine
- When curative treatment has failed
- When a pet requires long term intensive care
- With progressive illnesses, traumas with complications

Common Illnesses seen in Palliative and Hospice Care

There is no specific illnesses that require palliative or hospice care, but there are a few illnesses more commonly seen. These illnesses can be life threatening, painful, or terminal, but not necessarily right away.

- Osteoarthritis
- Cancer
- Seizures
- Chronic Renal Failure
- Heart Failure
Once you have decided to begin hospice care of your pet, an initial consultation is needed in order to establish care. Because this is a very emotional time for you and your family, it is best to make many decisions about your pet’s care at the initial consult.

Iowa Veterinary Specialties has compiled a packet of information for you to complete with the doctor on the initial consult. This packet includes:

**CONTACT INFORMATION**
- You and your family’s contact information
- Emergency Contact
- Support system information

**CONSENT FORM**
- If you are choosing hospice care for your pet, you must acknowledge that you are no longer pursuing a cure but providing palliative, end-of-life care for your pet.

**DISEASE PROCESS**
Your pet has been diagnosed with a life-threatening or terminal illness. At the initial hospice consultation, the doctor will define your pet’s disease process. Although all pets are different, many terminal illnesses follow a distinct path from diagnosis to end-of-life.

The doctor will take time to define this process for you. By defining the disease process, it allows you to better understand the state of your pet’s wellbeing at any given time.

Defining the Disease process can include:
- Nutritional support
- Disease Trajectory
- Symptom recognition and management
- Information on Death and Dying
**INITIAL HOME ASSESSMENT**

During your initial visit, the doctor will perform an assessment of your pet’s current home environment.

- Your pet’s home conditions
- Your pet’s primary caregiver
- Other pets in the home
- Evaluation of living conditions
- Supplies and Equipment needed
- Plan of Action

Using this information, the doctor will make her recommendations of care, frequency of visits, and continued communication.

**END-OF-LIFE PLAN**

Your pet’s end-of-life care is very important. That’s why you should be clear about your wishes before the time comes. There are two options available for your pet’s end-of-life plan. Both will be explained in detail later in this book.

- Natural Death
- Euthanasia

There are options for the euthanasia location based on your preference.

- At your home
- At your referring veterinarians office
- At Iowa Veterinary Specialties

There are two options regarding your pet’s remains after he’s passed.

- Cremation (option for ashes returned)
- Owner takes remains for private burial
WHERE DOES PALLIATIVE AND HOSPICE CARE TAKE PLACE?

Hospice and palliative care are performed in a variety of different settings. The goal of either treatment is to keep the pet comfortable throughout the process. With this in mind, the location of your pet’s palliative and hospice treatment is determined by finding the right balance of comfort and services needed.

Once the initial visit is completed, your pet is enrolled in Iowa Veterinary Specialties’ Hospice Program. It is important to treat your pet in an environment that is comfortable for him.

IN-HOSPITAL

Palliative treatment typically begins in the hospital. Your pet will visit often for the doctor to assess your pet’s health and treatment program. When your pet is treated in-hospital, the doctor has the benefit of having access to all that the hospital has to offer. Iowa Veterinary Specialties is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, allowing your pet to receive the care it needs at any time.

Iowa Veterinary Specialties aims to provide an environment that is quiet and relaxing for your pet during his palliative care treatment. Even with the opportunities available through a full service hospital, there are times where in-home treatment may be right for your pet.
In-Home

The pet’s home environment can be an option for the doctor or care team to provide palliative or hospice care. Your pet may be more comfortable in a familiar environment or around familiar companions. Each pet’s personality and disease process is unique. Your pet’s hospice doctor will discuss with you what options will be best for your pet based on his individual needs.

Your pet’s care is our top priority. It is important to take the time to discuss these options with your pet’s hospice veterinarian.

Whether your pet is being treated at Iowa Veterinary Specialties’ hospital or at your home, it’s very important to create an environment that is comforting for your pet. Not only should your pet be comfortable in the environment, but they also need to feel comfortable physically.

Creating comfort

Creating an environment that comforts your pet is a key component of palliative medicine. You should provide an area in your home that contains:

- comfortable pet bed
- easy access to food and water
- comfortable room temperature
- soft, comforting music
- non-slip flooring
- low sided litter box
- respite from other pets and children
Palliative Therapies

Every disease process is different. Iowa Veterinary Specialties offers a wide variety of palliative therapies that can help your pet remain comfortable during his time in hospice care.

Therapies include:
- **Opioids** - e.g. Morphine, Tramadol
- **Steroids** - e.g. Prednisone, Prednisolone
- **NSAIDs** - e.g. Meloxicam, Carprofen
- **Anesthetics** - e.g. Lidocaine
- **Diuretics** - e.g. Furosemide
- **Fluid Therapy**
- **Oxygen Therapy**
- **Acupuncture**
- **Essential Oils**
- **Nutritional Supplements**
- **Probiotics**

Canine patient receiving acupuncture therapy.

Pain Management

Pain management plays a large role in palliative and hospice care. The doctor will give you techniques on how to spot pain in your pet. It is important for you to objectively monitor your pet’s pain levels so that treatment can reflect your pet’s needs.

Quality of Life

Your pet’s quality of life needs to be carefully monitored throughout the palliative and hospice care process. The doctor will provide a Quality of Life scale for your pet. If your pet’s quality of life begins to diminish, the doctor may increase palliative therapies. When palliative therapies stop working, the end-of-life plan may need to be initiated.

Quality of Life Scale
During the initial consultation, you will need to determine how to handle your pet’s end-of-life care. It’s important to make these tough decisions before the hospice care process begins. This period of time can be very emotionally taxing for you and your family. By making an informed decision prior to your pet’s end of life, your pet will be less likely to suffer while this tremendous decision is made.

There are two options available for your pet’s end-of-life plan.
- Natural Death
- Euthanasia

Iowa Veterinary Specialties does not take the end-of-life plan lightly. This is a very important decision that should be discussed in-depth.

**Natural Death**

Often, natural death occurs without warning. Even if you’ve elected to euthanize your pet, natural death may occur. If you’ve made the decision to allow your pet to pass naturally, it is very important to monitor his quality of life closely.

In choosing a natural death for your pet, it may be difficult to control his pain and maintain his quality of life. It is important to understand that your pet’s hospice veterinarian may suggest humane euthanasia if pain is not being adequately controlled. Ultimately, it is your decision to continue with a natural death or to euthanize.
**Euthanasia**

Euthanasia is humanely ending your pet's life. Euthanasia is recommended when palliative therapies are unable to maintain an acceptable quality of life. Some pets may appear to be peacefully resting, but in fact may be in considerable pain. It is up to you to objectively monitor your pet’s quality of life. When your pet’s quality of life decreases to below an acceptable level, it may be time to consider euthanasia.

Euthanasia should be performed in a setting that is comfortable for the pet. Iowa Veterinary Specialties can offer a quiet peaceful room for euthanasia to occur. Some owner’s prefer that their pet’s referring veterinarian perform the euthanasia, an in-home euthanasia may be possible as well. Iowa Veterinary Specialties is committed to helping you as much as possible during this difficult transition.

**Care of Remains**

There are several different options for your pet after he has passed.

- **Cremation:** Your pet will be cremated at Loving Rest Pet Cemetery, or a crematory of your choosing. You may choose between a group cremation (your pet is cremated in a group and ashes are spread at Loving Rest), or Private (your pet is cremated alone, ashes are returned to you).
- **Returned to owner:** You may keep your pet’s remains for private burial/cremation. Please check with your city or county’s government for regulations concerning pet burial.
Enrolling your pet in hospice care is not an easy process. You’ll have many emotions as you grieve the loss of your friend, even prior to his passing. The doctors and staff of Iowa Veterinary Specialties are here to help you during this difficult time. It is important to have a support system (friends, family, spiritual/religious leader, mental health counselor) in place prior to your pet’s passing.

**SAYING GOODBYE**


**GRIEVING YOUR LOSS**


**SUPPORT**

ASPCA Pet Loss Support
www.aspca.org/pet-care/pet-loss
1(877) 474-3310

The Association for Pet Loss and Bereavement
www.aplb.org (Pet Loss Resource and Chat Room)

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline
1-800-273-TALK (8255)
www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org (Chat available)
Our Hospice and Palliative Care Team

Leah Braas, DVM

Dr. Braas graduated from Iowa State University’s College of Veterinary Medicine in 2002. Dr. Braas has been working with Iowa Veterinary Specialties since 2012. Dr. Braas has recently studied at the Chi Institute for Traditional Chinese Veterinary medicine. Dr. Braas’ interests include acupuncture as well as other integrative medicines. Dr. Braas will head the Hospice and Palliative Care department. While working with the other departments at Iowa Veterinary Specialties, she will lend her expertise and knowledge to help you and your pet during this difficult time.

Iowa Veterinary Specialties has been serving central Iowa’s pets since 1980. From its beginnings as an after-hours emergency clinic, it has grown to become Iowa’s premier veterinary specialty and 24/7 emergency hospital. Iowa Veterinary Specialties is owned by Iowa State University’s Veterinary Services Corporation, providing seamless comprehensive care and improvement of the profession with the Lloyd Veterinary Medical Center at Iowa State University. Our services include:

- Internal Medicine
- Oncology
- 24/7 Emergency
- Surgery
- Dermatology
- Dentistry
- Ophthalmology
- Hospice/Palliative Care
- Canine Blood Bank
- Diagnostic Services
COMPASSIONATE CARE, FOR YOU AND YOUR PET.

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