Palliative Medicine and Hospice Care, the Third Option

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Palliative medicine and hospice care have become a new area of interest, expertise, and opportunity in companion animal practice. It is a philosophy of care that supports good quality of life for pets with life-limiting diseases as they and their families face the challenges associated with their illness.

What happens when a veterinarian diagnoses a life-limiting disease in an elderly dog or cat and medical or surgical intervention is indicated, but the owner just cannot afford it, or for other reasons, the owner simply does not want it? Are veterinarians obligated to provide hospice and palliative care? Actually, social ethics and the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) policy statements say yes. AVMA Guidelines for Veterinary Hospice Care states, "Veterinarians or veterinary hospitals that are unable to offer hospice care should be prepared to refer clients to another veterinarian who can offer these services. Referring this activity does not infer that excellent care is not being delivered by the referring veterinarian, but provides more options for the client desiring to access veterinary hospice." Palliative medicine and hospice care is indeed a viable third option that should be offered to clients when neither premature euthanasia nor aggressive medical treatment is desired or wise.

PLANNING
The program components will vary, reflecting each veterinarian's personal preferences, and foremost in importance is choosing which medical services to provide. Much of this care can take place through consultations or a house call practice so that the patient may remain at home. Full service hospitals offer more options for palliative medical or surgical interventions and advanced diagnostics, but it is difficult in hospitals to offer the relaxed environment of home. An existing space could be renovated to create a comfort room or a new facility could even be built (Fig. 1). Even options like daycare services for debilitated patients with working owners are possible. Referral may be necessary to offer acupuncture, chiropractic, rehabilitation, and advanced pain management. A veterinarian wanting to offer palliative and hospice care should never be restricted because of physical constraints or the inability to afford a facility. It is the philosophy of care that is important, and core concepts can be applied in any location or combination of locations.

The hospice team consists of veterinarians, veterinary technicians, assistants, volunteers, social workers, clergy, and bereavement counselors. An interdisciplinary team is necessary as support and care must be available 24/7. The fee schedule should be based on the time invested by the veterinarian and staff in caring for the pet. Most pet insurance companies will

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Full text of Advances in Small Animal Medicine and Surgery is available at www.advancesinsmallanimal.com

Figure 1. Pet and owner benefit from a comfort room and home nursing services provided by veterinary technicians; an essential component of animal hospice. (Courtesy of Amir Shanan, DVM, Chicago, IL)
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Anxiolytic Supplements

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INTRODUCTION
A wide range of supplements are available for the treatment of behavior disorders. Clients frequently inquire about treatment with a supplement instead of a psychotropic medication for their pet. Client concerns may stem from worries about adverse effects caused by traditional medications, recommendations from friends, and personal experience. Veterinarians may also want to avoid the potential negative side effects of psychiatric medications or may choose a supplement to avoid drug interactions for patients under medical treatment for other diseases. The veterinarian’s challenge is in determining which supplements are efficacious and under which conditions treatment with a supplement is indicated. Because supplements are not regulated by the Food and Drug Administration, claims can vary widely and do not have to be substantiated by research. The purpose of this paper is to examine Zylkene (Venquest) and Anxitane (Virbac), 2 commercially available supplements and summarize recent research pertaining to their use in the treatment of behavioral disorders.

CASEINATE HYDROLYSATE
Bovine αs-casein tryptic hydrolysate has been shown to have anxiolytic properties in humans and rats.1 The peptide affects the gamma-amino-2-butyric acid (GABA) type A receptors, but does not have an affinity for the benzodiazepine site of the GABA type A receptor or peripheral benzodiazepine receptors.2 When compared to diazepam in rats, the peptide is as effective at relieving anxiety without any obvious disinhibition. In pet animals, disinhibition of learned behavior can be dangerous. Disinhibited pets may resort to aggression more quickly than pets who are not affected in this way.

Previous Research
Zylkene, a product containing caseinate hydrolysate, is commercially available for dogs and cats. Beeta et al. conducted a double-blinded placebo-controlled trial to assess the efficacy of Zylkene in anxious cats.3 A total of 34 cats were enrolled, with 17 cats in each group. Cats were evaluated 5 times in 8 weeks by questionnaire and 2 by phone interview of owners. Cats treated with Zylkene showed a significant improvement over cats treated with placebo in interactions with familiar and unfamiliar people. There were no statistically significant differences between the 2 groups regarding fear, global anxiety score, or autonomic signs.

“Both Zylkene and Anxitane show promise as anxiolytic agents in dogs and cats.”

Beeta et al. conducted a double-blinded randomized trial investigating the effect of Zylkene on anxiety disorders in dogs when compared to selecline (Anipryl).4 Thirty-eight dogs were enrolled in the study and assigned randomly to the treatment or control groups. Dogs were evaluated 4 times in 8 weeks (2 by phone and 3 in person). There were no statistically significant differences between Zylkene and selecline. Both compounds reduced anxiety with similar efficacies.

Recent Research
Palestrini et al. investigated the effects of caseinate hydrolysate on anxiety in dogs in a double-blinded placebo-controlled study. In this study, 40 female brachycephalic dogs ranging in age from 10 months to 4 years were divided into 2 groups: anxious and non-anxious. Each group was subdivided into a treatment group and a control group. Treatment groups were fed a diet containing caseinate hydrolysate, and the placebo groups were fed a diet without the supplement. Baseline values for serum cortisol, serum lysozyme, neutrophil lymphocyte ratios, and mean heart rate were obtained prior to the start of the study. Dogs were evaluated behaviorally and medically every 4 weeks for 8 weeks.

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