

A Survey of Veterinarians in the US: Euthanasia and Other End-of-Life Issues

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Source: [Anthrozoos: A Multidisciplinary Journal of The Interactions of People & Animals](#),
Volume 24, Number 2, June 2011 , pp. 167-174(8)

Abstract:

A stressful aspect of veterinary medicine is the euthanasia of animals, especially companion animals. The veterinarian must relate to both the suffering animal and the grieving client. An objective of this project was to assess veterinarians' need for training on how to help themselves and their clients with animal euthanasia considerations. Additionally, we sought to determine if practitioners felt well prepared from veterinary school. A survey of 463 veterinarians in the southeastern United States (return rate = 75%) found that they average euthanizing 7.53 animals per month. The majority of clients were present during the process, and most left the animal for the veterinarian to make the final disposal of the remains, typically cremation. Most veterinary practices did not have a trained grief counselor on staff, however, referrals to a grief support group and or a hotline were often made. The majority of veterinarians did not think that their veterinary school training prepared them to relate to owners of terminally-ill animals, though more recent graduates were more favorable toward their training than earlier graduates. The overwhelming majority of veterinarians felt that veterinary schools should place more emphasis on communication skills for dealing with owners of terminally-ill animals.

Keywords: [COMPANION ANIMAL](#); [END-OF-LIFE ISSUES](#); [EUTHANASIA](#); [GRIEF](#);
[VETERINARIANS](#); [VETERINARY EDUCATION](#)

Document Type: Research article

DOI: 10.2752/175303711X12998632257666

Publication date: 2011-06-01