

Handling Difficult Euthanasias

Preventing issues and what to do if things go wrong

Kathleen Cooney DVM, CHPV, CCFP



CAETA

TODAY

Euthanasia and dysthanasia

Pet owner expectations

The essential components

Creating 'EuHarmony'



COLLEGE OF VETERINARY MEDICINE
AND BIOMEDICAL SCIENCES
COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY







***What is
Euthanasia?***

Ideal Components

Animal patient sleeping

No pain on injections

Minimal restraint

Safe environment

Everyone ready

Quiet death

Quick death

Ideal Components of Euthanasia

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Proper technique is delivered.

The procedure is in line with professional and societal welfare expectations.

Observers feel safe and supported.

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Painful injections

Heavy restraint

Active, loud death

Slow, extended death (?)

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Pet Owner Expectations

COMMENTARY STARTER

How pet owners define a “good death”

New study reveals some surprising facts



Euthanasia is a procedure that most veterinarians perform frequently. It is chosen for many reasons, most commonly to relieve pain and suffering when further treatment is no longer in the patient's best interest. Euthanasia is conventionally defined as the ending of a life that minimizes or eliminates pain and distress. Veterinary professionals, relying on their expertise and experience, aim to perform euthanasia in ways that align with the best interest of all involved.

Studies on euthanasia have helped validate some of the things we have learned and most owners want to be allowed to witness the death of their pet,^{1,2} they want reassurance they are making the right choice³ and they look toward their veterinary teams to provide guidance on deciding the right time.⁴ Euthanasia is an important procedure, critical not only for animal welfare⁵ but also for the emotional well-being of the owner and owner-veterinarian relationship.⁶

Yet, aside from some overarching generalizations, we know little about how pet owners define a “good” euthanasia vs a bad one (dysthanasia). What is important to them? How does this compare with veterinary professionals' definitions? What's being provided in practice today?

To help answer this question—how pet owners define a good death—the Companion Animal Euthanasia Training Academy (CAETA) distributed an anonymous online survey to pet owners between December 2021 and January 2022. We want to share with you what we learned.

HOW PET OWNERS DEFINE A GOOD DEATH

We analyzed responses from 1578 primarily White, college-educated, women pet owners. When asked to rate the euthanasia that impacted them the most, most owners reported positive experiences. In fact, on a scale from 1 (worst experience) to 10 (best experience), 14% reported scores between 1 and 5, 27% reported scores between 6 and 8, and 59% reported scores between 9 and 10.

To better understand what predicted a good (scores of 9-10) experience, we asked a series of questions related to before, during, and after the euthanasia procedure.

Location

We began by asking about the location of the procedure. We found that owners were more likely to report having

a positive experience if the euthanasia was performed at home (80%) than if performed at a veterinary hospital (43%). We asked what elements of an at-home euthanasia are most important in determining a good experience and found that the things deemed as most important include a veterinarian who comes prepared with all the materials needed, is friendly and provides a relaxed atmosphere, is willing to gather where the pet wants to be (eg, on the bed), and provides private time before and after the euthanasia.

Owners were also more likely to report a positive experience if they had at least 1 day to prepare (66%) vs if it was an emergency (33%). The more time owners had to prepare, the more likely they were to report a positive experience. Relatedly, those who had a pre-euthanasia appointment were more likely to report experiencing a good death than those who did not (69% vs 59%, respectively). When asked about elements of the pre-euthanasia appointment, the most important element identified by owners was that they felt the euthanasia procedure was explained in a way they understood.

So it would appear that preplanning, and particularly a pre-euthanasia appointment, is helpful in creating a positive experience.

Use of sedatives

What else is important within the euthanasia event? The next series of questions explored the use of sedatives prior to euthanasia. We found that owners were more likely to be satisfied when their pet was given a sedative prior to euthanasia (62%) vs when not given a sedative (31%). When asked about the effect of the sedative, owners reported the highest positive experience when their pet was fully asleep (66%) vs relaxed and partially asleep (62%) or relaxed and fully awake (51%). When asked about the amount of time between the sedative and euthanasia injection, we found that longer was better. Although 52% of those with less than a minute between the time of sedation and euthanasia reported a positive experience, this number increased to 64% when the time between sedation and euthanasia injection was more than 3 minutes. Ratings stayed high (64%) when the time between sedation and euthanasia injection was more than 20 minutes. This suggests that even when things take longer between sedation and the euthanasia injection than planned, this is not necessarily viewed negatively by owners. Instead, we found that the most important aspects of sedation to owners in determining



written by

Kathleen Cooney, DVM, MS, CHPV, CCFP

Cooney is the founder and director of education for the Companion Animal Euthanasia Training Academy in Loveland, Colorado, and chief medical officer of Caring Pathways.



written by

Lori Kogan, PhD

Kogan is a professor and psychologist at the College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences at Colorado State University in Fort Collins, Colorado.

The Top 5 Things Included in a Good Death

The Top 5 Things Included in a Good Death

1. To be with their pet for the entire procedure
2. Help with preplanning – reduce regret
3. Pet sleeping for the entire procedure
4. No pain or anxiety
5. Home euthanasia option

Actual vs perceived dysthanasia



14 ESSENTIAL COMPONENTS

- G Grief support materials provided
- O Outline caregiver and pet preferences
- O Offer privacy before and after death
- D Deliver proper technique
- E Establish rapport
- U Use pre-euthanasia sedation or anesthesia
- T Thorough, complete consent
- H Helpful and compassionate personnel
- A Adequate time
- N Narrate the process
- A Avoid pain and anxiety
- S Safe space to gather
- I Inclusion of loved ones
- A Assistance with body care



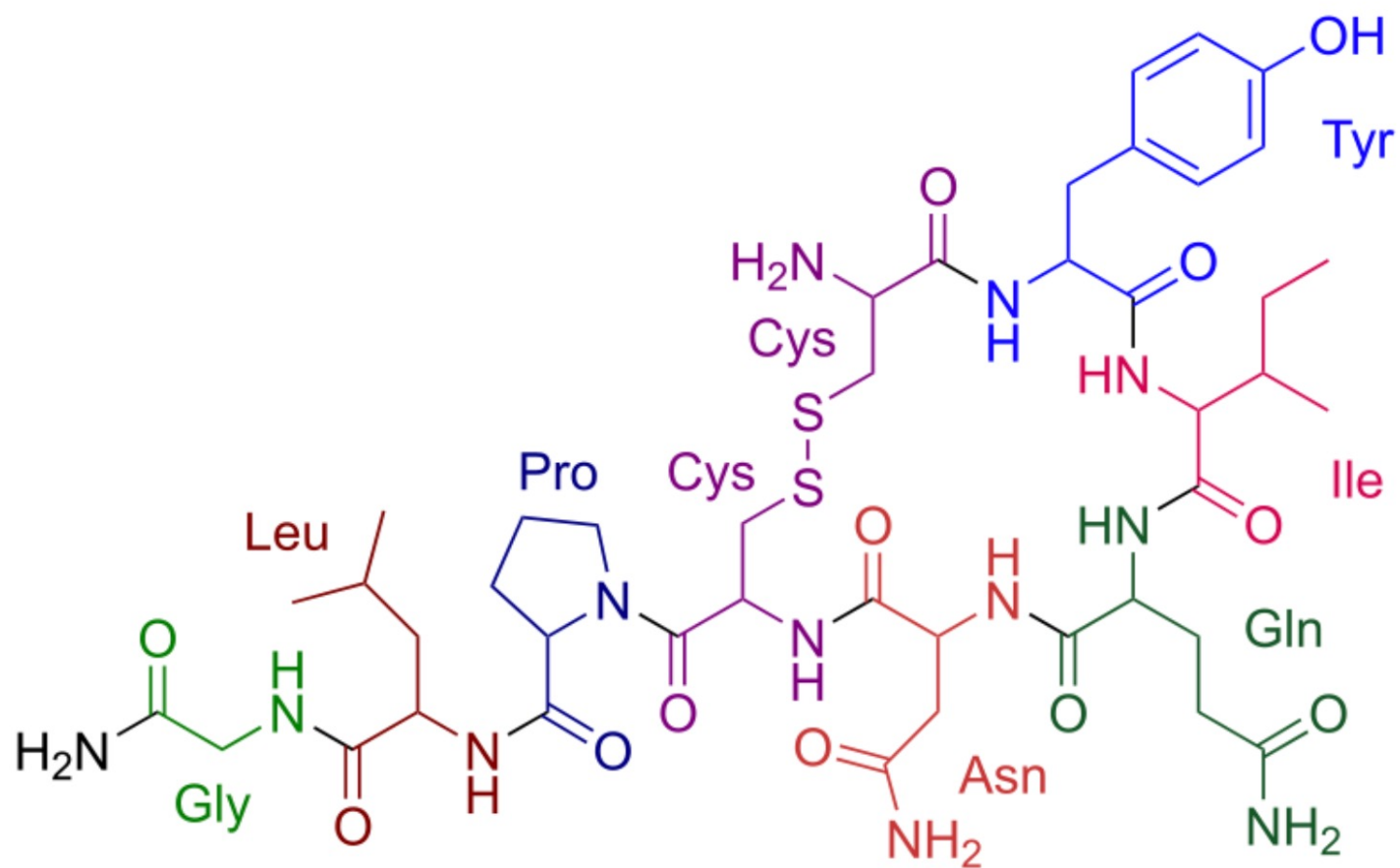
Reducing Risk in Euthanasia Work

- Preplanning
 - ~ Client education
- Avoid unnecessary complications
 - ~ Overly sick, dyspnea, etc.
- Advocate for hospice

Reducing Risk in Euthanasia Work

- Consider PVPs (pre-visit pharmaceuticals)
- Communication – empathy and partnership
- Know the techniques





Oxytocin

- Smiling
- Touch
- Supportive conversation
- Relaxed state of being

Oxytocin

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What turns euthanasia into a dysthanasia?



What to do about it

Let families know you will be calling

Call within 24 hours

Provide time to talk about what happened

Create a positive from it

Debrief with the team

Protecting the team

Self regulation

Mindfulness

Limits to appt volume

Regular checkins

Education



Protecting the team

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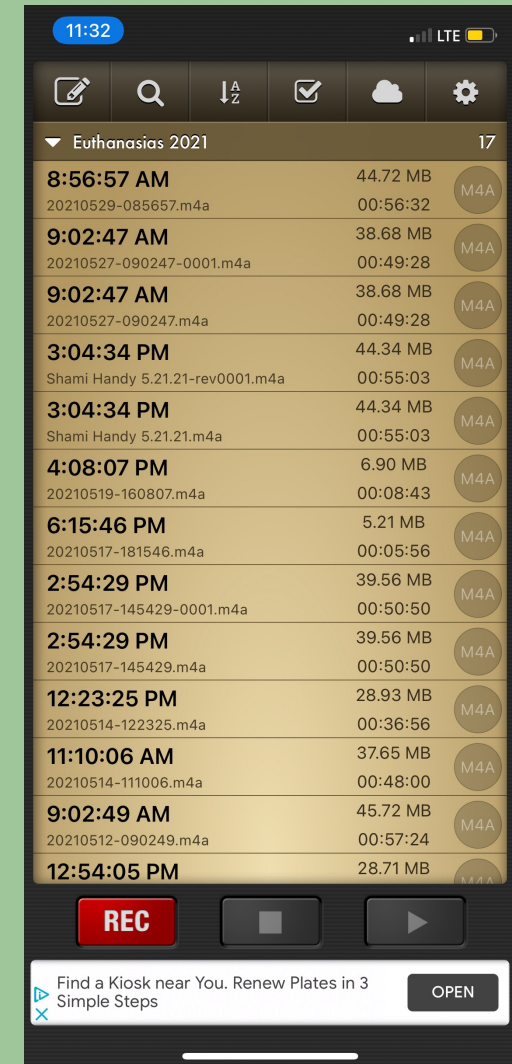
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Leveraging Experts

- Consider deeper relationships
- Hire them for internal and external services
- Triage on those busy days

To record or not to record...





Kintsugi

Reducing Risk Next Week

Start building out your euthanasia SOPs

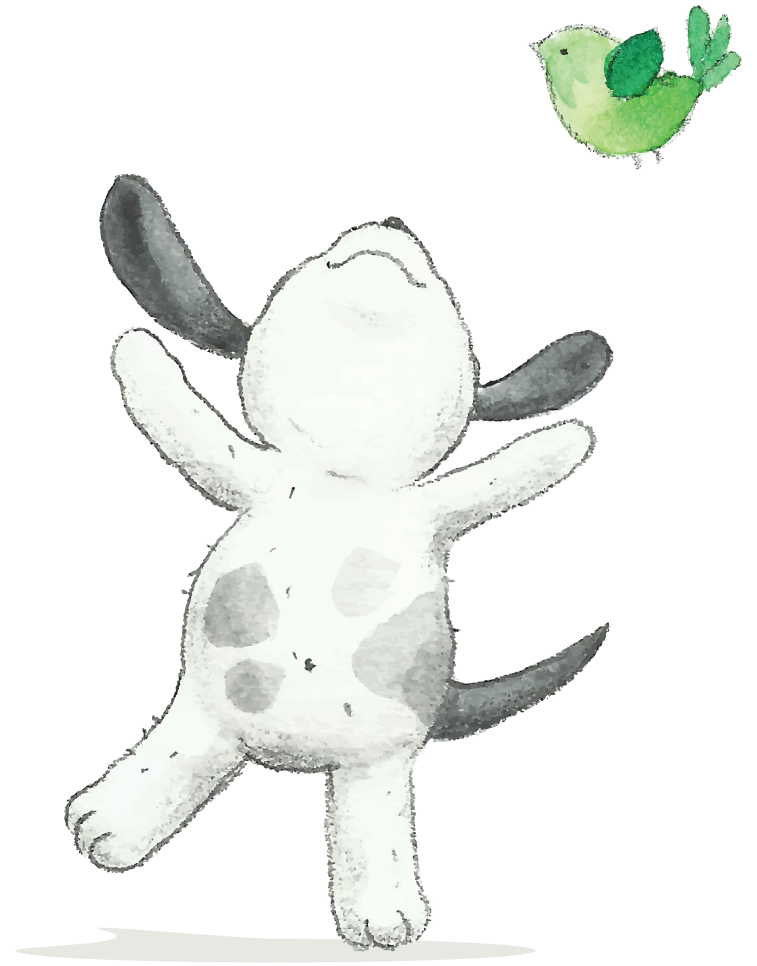
Slow down and build more rapport

Avoid painful injections

Make it an 'experience'

Learn alternative techniques

Today I learned...





Let's keep that learning going



The Companion Animal
Euthanasia Training Academy

Master 10-hour Certificate Program

Technique laboratory workshop

Over 30 hours of education

Recorded euthanasia appointments

The CAETA Community

Facebook group

EuBoosters events

Newsletters

Blogs

YouTube channel

EuHarmony Hospital Program





Thank You

Kathleen Cooney DVM, CHVP, CCFP
kathleen@caetainternational.com