

The CSU Pet Hospice Program:
End-of Life Care for Pets and Their Families

Gail A. Bishop, Christie C. Long, Kelly S. Carlsten, Katie C. Kennedy, Jane R. Shaw

ABSTRACT

While the concept of hospice care for humans has existed for decades and is an integral part of the dying process, providing hospice care for companion animals is a new and growing service. Recently veterinarians and pet-owners recognized that there is a need and a demand to care for pets with terminal illnesses. The Colorado State University Pet Hospice program meets those needs through supporting pets, their owners and veterinarians, and educating professional veterinary students in end-of-life care. Developed in 2003, the Pet Hospice is a student-run program that trains veterinary students in animal hospice care and matches them with the family of a terminally ill pet in the community, and their veterinarian. Since its inception, 79 veterinary student volunteers have been trained and provided support to 34 families. Continued expansion of the client base, enlargement of the network of veterinarians and volunteers, and positive program evaluations reflect the strong impact of Pet Hospice and its support from veterinary students, veterinarians, and the community.

Keywords: Pet loss, Hospice, Pawspice, Euthanasia, Palliative care, End-of-Life, Quality of Life, Student Programs, Human-Animal Bond

INTRODUCTION

The term “hospice” has been used since medieval times when hospice was an actual place of lodging where weary travelers could find shelter and respite from their journey. Today, the concept of hospice encompasses an extensive model of care, offering services tailored to the individual needs of the terminally ill patient and their families. The modern concept of hospice

care, taking care of the dying patient and their family's physical, spiritual, emotional, and financial needs, was first pioneered by Dr. Cicely Saunders, a British physician who opened the first in-patient hospice in London, England in 1967.¹ The principles of hospice spread to the United States more than three decades ago as consumers and healthcare professionals recognized that the fragmented healthcare system was failing the dying.^{1,2} Although the original philosophy of care was embraced, over time the focus and delivery of services shifted from in-patient units to care within the home and is now provided within a variety of settings.

One of the unique aspects of the hospice philosophy is embracing a holistic approach; both the patient and family are seen as a unit of care, and care is individualized to meet their specific needs, while being responsive to different lifestyles.³ Throughout the process, hospice care affirms life and promotes self-determination. Hospice care has been shown to benefit family members of the terminally ill by preparing them emotionally, improving their coping skills, and providing them with a support system.⁴ In this manner, hospice promotes that the journey of life eventually leads to death, and emphasizes palliative care, which includes physical, emotional and spiritual comfort delivered by an interdisciplinary team of professionals and volunteers. This team is usually comprised of hospice nurses, social workers, an overseeing physician, and family members.²

Today, companion animals are recognized as part of the family. Eighty-four percent of pet owners refer to themselves as their pet's "mom or dad".⁵ Given the strong emotional ties, it seems appropriate and necessary to extend hospice care to terminally ill pets and their families. Pet hospice is modeled after the human hospice philosophy; it functions on the principle that death is a part of life. Pet hospice addresses pain control, and attends to the physical and emotional comfort to the pet, while providing educational and emotional support

to the family. The veterinary team trains caregivers in administering medications, learning pain assessment skills, monitoring pain management, evaluating proper hydration and nutrition, as well as grief education.

The differences between human and pet hospice are becoming fewer over time, although there are specific differences. The criteria of care for human hospice is a diagnosis of six months or less to live, while for pet hospice life expectancy is days to weeks. Human hospice offers an interdisciplinary team of professionals to care for families, while a pet hospice team consists only of the veterinarian and perhaps their technicians. Unlike pet hospice, human hospice mandates that bereavement counseling is offered to its families for up to a year after the death of the patient. One of stark differences is that euthanasia decision-making is supported through pet hospice. Pet hospice is a time of transition between treatment and death.

The veterinary community responded to the demand for end-of-life care for animals by publishing guidelines for appropriate hospice care. AVMA guidelines ensure quality of life through adequate pain management, regular monitoring by veterinary staff, and emotional resources for pet owners.⁶ This framework creates a standard of care and acts as a reference for veterinarians creating animal hospice programs across the country.⁷

Veterinarians play a critical role in how owners experience the death of their pet and greatly impact an owner's ability to grieve.⁸ Researchers found that many owners feel veterinarians are best equipped to provide emotional support during end-of-life care for their pet. Given their substantial influence, it is essential for veterinarians to receive adequate training regarding owner grief.⁹ While outside resources are available, most veterinary students receive only

cursory training in end-of-life care for pet owners and their animals.¹⁰ Similar concerns have been raised within the human medical field. The American Medical Association has responded by providing a workshop addressing care for terminally ill patients.¹¹ By addressing palliative care and grief within the curriculum, doctors and veterinarians alike will be better trained to respond to the demand for end-of-life and hospice care.

Teaching the hospice philosophy within the veterinary medicine curriculum and offering students the opportunity to engage in end-of-life discussions, while providing hospice care in a home environment, enhances the students' professional depth and qualifications as future veterinarians. Hospice volunteers receive training and experience beyond the core curriculum; augmenting their skills and increasing their confidence in conducting end-of-life discussions. Students interact with community and University veterinarians, gaining skills in creating plans for care, writing case notes, and developing professional relationships. Student program managers gain additional skills in management, program development, and volunteer recruitment and retention. Pet hospice provides a much needed service reaching out to the surrounding community. The families and their dying companion animal receive supportive care in their home from pet hospice volunteers, who are under the supervision and instruction of a veterinarian. The veterinarian is well informed on the status of their patient and family, while offering a valuable service to his or her clients.

Colorado State University [CSU] developed the nation's first pet hospice program based in a veterinary teaching hospital. The CSU Pet Hospice program is run by professional veterinary students, supported by the Argus Institute for Families and Veterinary Medicine [Argus Institute], and has provided animal hospice care for the Fort Collins, Colorado area since 2004.

The purpose of this paper is to describe CSU's Pet Hospice program as a model for establishing similar programs in other veterinary colleges and within communities.

History

In 2002, Charles Johnson, DVM and Jack Lebel, DVM envisioned starting a community hospice program for pets. They gathered several interested parties to brainstorm the idea and the Argus Institute was invited to assist with the planning process. Gail Bishop, the Clinic Coordinator for the Argus Institute with 17 years of human hospice experience, became involved and the Pet Hospice task force was created. The task force involved area veterinarians, a representative from the local human hospice agency, and a representative from the local community college, which offers a veterinary technician degree. The resources the taskforce utilized included the local human hospice organization, AVMA guidelines, and the experiences of taskforce members. A supportive partnership with the local human hospice organization was instrumental to program development, in particular designing infrastructure, recruitment, training and retention of volunteers, and creating job descriptions.

The task force met on a regular basis for one year, designing the basic infrastructure of the program. During that year, the concept of involving Professional Veterinary Medicine [PVM] students in the delivery of services was solidified and the Argus Institute agreed to oversee the program. A mission statement was created and job descriptions, guidelines, procedures, and protocols were designed. Goals and objectives were identified and educational meetings were held with veterinary college administrators to engender support and ensure collaboration with the project. The program received approval, and PVM students were polled for their interest in participating; their response was overwhelmingly positive. Similarly, a brief survey was mailed

to all area veterinarians to determine their interest in the program and the interest was again strongly positive.

The Pet Hospice task force, having completed most of its original goals and objectives, was reduced in size to a team of two: Julia Brannan, DVM and Gail Bishop; Drs. Charles Johnson and Jack Lebel were retained as consultants. These four individuals continued to meet throughout the fall of 2003 and spring of 2004 to further define the program's infrastructure, garner continued interest among area veterinarians, and to pursue external funding opportunities. The first Pet Hospice volunteer training session was held in the spring of 2004, and the program was launched with 18 volunteers. That same year, six veterinary clinics attended orientation training and the program was ready to receive its first case, which was referred from the CSU's James L. Voss Veterinary Teaching Hospital [VTH] in the fall of 2004.

Program Mission and Objectives

The mission of CSU Pet Hospice is to provide compassionate end-of-life care for pets and emotional support and education for their families. The objectives are four-fold: 1) to provide medical care to terminally ill pets in a home setting; 2) to provide owners with the emotional support and grief education to cope with the impending loss of their beloved pet; 3) to assist the referring veterinarian in providing palliative care for their patient; and 4) to educate veterinary students in providing end-of-life care for companion animals and their families.

METHODS

Leadership Team

The Pet Hospice program is a student-run organization and is advised by the Community Outreach Coordinator of the Argus Institute and a veterinarian on faculty at the CSU VTH. These Advisors work closely with the Team Managers to coordinate Pet Hospice activities, define the goals and protocols of the Pet Hospice program, oversee training of volunteers, and interview and select Team Managers.

The Pet Hospice program is managed by two PVM student Team Managers, one each from the second and third-year class. These students are selected at the end of their first year of veterinary school through an application and interview process, with a two-year term of service. This ensures that the program is piloted by one senior manager who has gained experience working in the program over the past two school years, and one junior manager who supports the senior manager and who learns the protocols and procedures of Pet Hospice before becoming the senior Team Manager.

The tasks of the Pet Hospice Team Managers are as follows:

1. Respond to all inquires regarding Pet Hospice that come through the Pet Hospice telephone, email account, or in person from interested parties
2. Assess incoming cases, explain Pet Hospice procedures to the owner and the veterinarian, and assign volunteer Case Managers to the case
3. Maintain communication with the Case Managers and assist them as necessary in providing services to clients
4. Plan and execute all volunteer training sessions
5. Interview and select new volunteers
6. Develop and update training material and Pet Hospice procedures documents

7. Orient veterinarians and their staff as to how to use Pet Hospice services
8. Serve as liaisons between the program and the community at large

The senior Team Manager publishes a monthly newsletter that is distributed to all Pet Hospice volunteers. Through the newsletter, the Team Managers communicate with volunteers about open and closed cases, publicity, changes to procedures, and announcements reducing the frequency of face-to-face meetings.

Case Management Team

PVM student volunteers are recruited from the first, second, and third year veterinary classes once per year during the fall semester. The Team Managers conduct an informational session and encourage interested students to apply and interview. Team Managers interview all interested candidates and document the level of veterinary medical experience in order to appropriately assign cases that require particular veterinary medical skills. Key duties of Case Managers include:

1. Work with Team managers to obtain knowledge about the case before the initial meeting
2. Team with another Case Manager to manage the case
3. Act as the liaison between the client, their pet, and the referring veterinarian
4. Assist the referring veterinarian with medical needs of patient
5. Support the client/family through education, communication, and preparation

Upon selection for the program, student Case Managers are formally oriented to the philosophy of Pet Hospice and its objectives. Each PVM student is given a “Procedures and Protocols” manual, which contains all the necessary information, forms, and guidelines for supporting a Pet Hospice case. Volunteers participate in at least two training sessions over the

course of the school year. Topics covered at these sessions include nursing care of the terminally ill patient, pain assessment, end-of-life communication, case reviews, and simulated interactions with grieving clients. All students are also provided with AVMA PLIT Student Liability coverage; Dr. Charles Johnson acts as sponsoring veterinarian and Pet Hospice pays dues for all of its volunteers.

For reasons of safety, support and mentoring, case managers work cases in pairs. They are equipped with a home visit bag containing grooming supplies, thermometer covers, cotton balls, hydrogen peroxide, alcohol, and paper towels and clay paw print kits. Case Managers are asked to bring their own stethoscopes and thermometers. Pet Hospice provides clippers and bandage changing supplies as needed. The Case Managers' kit includes literature about the grieving process, helping children with the death of a pet, and how to memorialize the loss of a pet. Case Managers discuss this information with clients and find that doing so helps owners deal more openly with their feelings about losing their pet and allows them to make an appropriate plan for end-of-life care for their pet.

To ensure that clients understand what to do if their pet becomes acutely ill, the Case Managers discuss the emergency plan as outlined by the referring veterinarian on the first home visit. Important information and phone numbers are written on a laminated card in case of emergency. Pet Hospice volunteers place this card on the client's refrigerator and secure it with a magnet that is pre-printed with the Pet Hospice phone number.

Veterinary clinics partner with Pet Hospice when they either have a patient who is a good candidate for hospice care, or when an owner expresses interest in Pet Hospice care. One of the Team Managers orients the clinic to the policies and procedures of the Pet Hospice

program. Each clinic is provided with a manual containing the steps for referring a case to Pet Hospice, guidelines for appropriate case selection, and communication procedures. Upon enrollment, the clinic submits information regarding that particular doctor's euthanasia protocols, body care procedures, and instructions for emergency situations.

For each individual case referral, the veterinarian submits medical case information, including specific disease process, instructions for treatments, medications the animal is receiving, and instructions with regards to euthanasia, body care, or emergency situations. The case instructions are saved on the private Pet Hospice website and a copy is emailed to each Case Manager assigned to the case. Throughout the case, the referring veterinarian is in constant contact with the volunteers, receiving updates on the progress of the pet, and giving instructions regarding treatments and client care.

Case Management

Network veterinarians are encouraged to discuss the appropriateness of individual cases with the Team Managers. The following guidelines are used to help referring veterinarians identify suitable cases:

- The animal must be terminally ill with a life expectancy of 3 months or less, either due to natural causes or the owner's choice of euthanasia.
- The pet's condition must be such that it can be made comfortable at home.
- The animal's home medical needs should be relatively simple in nature. More advanced procedures should be performed by the referring veterinarian.
- The client must be willing and able to work with our PVM student volunteers in their home.

- The pet's temperament should be amenable that it can interact with the Pet Hospice volunteers in a safe manner.
- The client's home needs to be within 30 minutes of the CSU VTH.

After a case is referred to Pet Hospice, a Team Manager contacts the referring veterinarian to gain more details regarding the case, the pet owner to assess what kind of assistance they desire from the program, and the two Case Managers to brief them on the case. One of the Case Managers then calls the pet owner to setup an initial meeting with the pet and family. The frequency of subsequent meetings are based on the needs of the pet and the owner. The Case Managers are always available for phone consultations and impromptu meetings if necessary. Every significant contact (a meeting or involved phone conversation) is documented and forwarded to the referring veterinarian, Team Managers, and Advisors for support.

Upon closure of a Pet Hospice case, either due to euthanasia or the natural death of the patient, Pet Hospice Case Managers send a condolence card with a personalized note to the owners, and make a phone call and/or visit within two days of the pet's death. The purpose is to ensure that we have done all that we can to help the family in dealing with their pet's death and to offer or recommend additional support or resources. On rare occasions, Case Managers have referred clients to local mental health services when it becomes clear that the owner is grieving to the extent that Pet Hospice personnel are not qualified to help them. The final responsibility of the Case Managers is to complete a case summary for Pet Hospice records and a copy is provided to the referring veterinarian.

Upon resolution of a case, the responsible Team Manager sends a survey to the referring

veterinarian requesting their feedback on case management. A survey is sent to the family of the pet no less than one month after the pet's death to ascertain the family's level of satisfaction with the care provided to them by Pet Hospice. Both surveys inform Pet Hospice about how to modify procedures to better serve our clients and veterinarians. In composing the case summary, Case Managers provide feedback and suggestions regarding case management and the program as a whole.

Program Development

Since its inception in 2002, the CSU Pet Hospice program has continually evolved meet the needs of its clients and the volunteer veterinary students, and the protocols and procedures have been modified based on feedback from key stakeholders. As the caseload increased, it became obvious that the Team Managers as well as Case Managers and Advisors needed access to program information in a timely fashion that could be accessed from multiple locations. This resulted in the creation of a private Pet Hospice web site, which serves as a central communication resource and contains pertinent communication documents related to open and closed cases

The annual budget of the Pet Hospice program is \$3000. Nearly half the budget is utilized for volunteer recruitment, training and retention (and one-third toward printing of brochures and supportive literature. Other expenses include office supplies, medical supplies, liability insurance dues, and phone bills. The services provided to veterinarians, clients and their pets are provided at no cost. Funding for the CSU Pet Hospice comes from private donations of previous clients, CSU Student Chapter of the AVMA, fundraising events, and a granting foundation.

The CSU Pet Hospice strives for active involvement within the Fort Collins community through participating in animal-related local events and responding to media requests for interviews and information regarding our program. The goal of these activities is to promote the concept of hospice care for animals, as well as to increase awareness among pet owners as to the need for quality end-of-life care for pets and their families. It is the experience of CSU Pet Hospice that while it is often difficult to gain the attention of veterinarians in busy practices, the concept of pet hospice is readily embraced by pet owners who have lost animals in the past and/or anticipate the death of a pet at some time in the future.

RESULTS

In the inaugural year (2004) the number of cases supported was 3, with 13 cases in 2005, and 18 cases in 2006. As many as seven cases were managed in one period of time. The total number of veterinary clinics that utilize CSU Pet Hospice services has nearly doubled since inception in 2004 from 7 to 14 practices and the number of veterinarians involved has more than tripled from 10 to 33 veterinarians. The Pet Hospice program began with 18 volunteers in 2004 and increased to 42 volunteers in 2006.

The majority (70%) of CSU Pet Hospice cases to date involved animals diagnosed with cancer; of which 19.2% were osteosarcoma and 11.5% were lymphoma. Renal failure was another common diagnosis (17%) and less common diagnoses included hepatic failure, hyperthyroidism, Feline Infectious Peritonitis, arthritis, cerebellar lesion, and degenerative myelopathy. Twenty-nine percent (10 of 34) of the cases were referred from CSU, either the

oncology or internal medicine services. The remaining 24 cases were referred from 13 local veterinary clinics.

The length of the case and the number of volunteer visits varied according to the animals' disease process and the clients' needs. The duration of the Pet Hospice cases ranged from 1 to 123 days with a mean of 35.3 days. The number of contacts by the volunteers with the client varied from 1 to 13 with a mean of 4 contacts. Client contact was defined as either an involved phone conversation with the client or a visit to the clients' home.

The response rate for the veterinarian surveys was 24% (8/34). Veterinarians were asked to evaluate the following criteria: volunteer-client-veterinarian communication, patient care, client feedback, case documentation, quality of service, timeliness of service and if they would recommend Pet Hospice to other clients. Although the response rate was low, veterinarian feedback was positive.

Volunteer feedback has been instrumental in the evolution of Pet Hospice. Volunteers identified the need for a private website to facilitate communication regarding cases and gain access to digital forms used by the program. The contents of medical kits are continually updated based on suggestions by Case Managers. Volunteers have requested more interactive training sessions, which led to the addition of role-playing exercises to volunteer training.

Client feedback has been highly positive in nature. Several clients have expressed appreciation of the volunteers' availability and having a person to contact when they needed information regarding their pet. Others have reported that it was helpful to have an outside

perspective and benefited from the grief and loss resources provided. Clients noted they would have liked to have known about Pet Hospice services sooner and would recommend our services to others.

DISCUSSION

Pet Hospice provides CSU veterinary students with a unique educational opportunity. Although discussions involving end-of-life issues and communication skills are presented in the veterinary curriculum, students benefit from increased exposure and conducting difficult end-of-life conversations in person. As a student-run service, Case Managers work exclusively with grieving clients in their homes. Such experiences improve the student's ability to communicate effectively with clients, empathize, and understand the grieving process. Additionally, the intimate experience of working with a client and their dying animal enhances students' understanding of the human-animal bond and develops tools for supporting clients' needs. Anecdotally, pet hospice volunteers demonstrate a greater skill level in discussing end-of-life issues with clients in the communication curriculum as perceived by the instructors. Volunteering with Pet Hospice prepares future veterinarians to provide hospice care and facilitate end-of-life conversations for families and their pets.

The responsibilities of the two Team Managers promote development of communication and leadership skills. Specifically, Team Managers demonstrate public speaking skills through community presentations, volunteer training, and on-site veterinary orientation sessions. Pet Hospice Team Managers also gain experience in human resources and administration and

motivating and managing a large number of volunteers, enhancing their ability to be a successful leader in a practice environment.

The CSU Pet Hospice program helps build relationships between current veterinary students, practicing veterinarians, and the college. Student volunteers have the opportunity to work closely with community veterinarians exposing them to different approaches to case management. Students learn from veterinarians in the practice setting which complements their training in the academic setting. Pet Hospice case managers gain technical skills pertaining to nursing care (maintaining intravenous catheters and feeding tubes, changing bandages, and performing brief physical examinations) and pain assessment using several widely accepted pain scales.¹²

Veterinarians provide a valuable service to their client at no charge, as well as receive updates about their patient from a medically trained individual. Clinicians often do not have enough time or training to provide in-home veterinary care and the emotional support many grieving pet owners need.¹⁰ Pet Hospice volunteers relay important medical information to pet owners from their veterinarian and provide emotional support and resources on pet loss and grief. Offering hospice care to clients builds long-term veterinarian-client-patient relationships through high quality animal healthcare. Program veterinarians have the opportunity to support the professional development of future veterinarians to serve animals and society.

Pet owners are offered a unique service to care for their animal in the comfort of their home and are supported emotionally through the end-of-life process. Clients and pets avoid numerous trips to the veterinary hospital by having volunteers assess their pet in the home. Volunteers regularly monitor the animal's condition, supporting the owner's observations. Pet

owners are given time to adjust to the idea of losing their companion to a terminal illness. Learning that your companion has a terminal diagnosis can be devastating and having a support team, education and resources can be empowering. Furthermore, making the decision if and when to humanely euthanize your animal can be extremely difficult and owners often struggle with guilt when making this decision.¹³ Education is provided on assessing their companion's quality of life and these difficult discussions are facilitated by pet hospice volunteers, who provide resources on pet loss and grief. Discussing end-of-life issues helps pet owners balance the challenge between keeping the animal with them for as long as they can and ensuring the animal's quality of life. Several clients have requested that Pet Hospice volunteers accompany them during the euthanasia procedure as an additional source of support. Hospice volunteers play a role in educating parents on how to help their child through the loss of their pet, which is often a child's first experience with death. Developing grief coping strategies as a child allows us to better process loss as an adult.¹⁴

Most importantly, animals benefit from hospice philosophy which emphasizes quality-of-life, pain control, and aims at having pets rest comfortably in their home. Fewer trips to the veterinary clinic reduces overall animal stress and anxiety. Regular assessments by a trained volunteer ensure appropriate comfort care and timely reporting of concerns to the veterinarian. Through educating pet owners, the animal receives high quality home care and early detection and alleviation of pain and suffering. Animal hospice care allows pets to spend their last days with their family in a comfortable and familiar setting.

Since Pet Hospice started, interest in animal hospice care has grown significantly. The program has received numerous inquiries from across the United States from other veterinary schools, private practitioners, and citizens within the community interested in establishing a pet

hospice program of their own. CSU Pet Hospice has served as an important national resource and as a model for animal hospice at veterinary teaching facilities.

One challenge of the program is working with clients who do not have professional relationship with a veterinarian. On several occasions we have been contacted by an owner interested in Pet Hospice care for their animal, but the animal has not recently been examined by a veterinarian or given a diagnosis. It is CSU Pet Hospice policy that an animal must be diagnosed with a terminal condition by a veterinarian who is willing to provide information about the disease, case supervision, and consistent interaction with Case Managers. Successful case management is dependent upon a strong veterinarian-client-patient relationship. The veterinarian provides the Pet Hospice case manager with the goals of the care plan, how the animal's medical needs should be met, and what the role of the volunteer will be in the case. Pet Hospice is a service that veterinarians can offer their clients and this service varies depending on the needs identified by the veterinarian. In some cases, the supporting veterinarian may only request Pet Hospice provide their client with emotional support and resources for making end-of-life decisions, and in other cases the patient may need regular nursing care.

Another challenge has been communication with veterinarians due to their busy schedule. To ensure that clients are provided with the best possible service, the volunteers need to contact the supporting veterinarian in a timely manner. As veterinarians are usually occupied with their daily duties, communication is often conducted via email or fax. A possible solution would be to have an assigned contact person within the practice. This hospital contact could act as a point person between the veterinarian and Pet Hospice Case Manager. Another scenario common to multi-doctor practices is having several veterinarians involved with the case and maintaining

up-to-date communication with all of them, as well as the client, can be difficult. The creation of digital forms and utilizing electronic communication has been helpful when communicating with several parties. The low response rate of veterinarian surveys is contributed to veterinarians' busy schedules and a follow-up protocol is underway to increase feedback.

A key principle of Pet Hospice is keeping the animal comfortable in the home and many pet owners request an in-home euthanasia. Some veterinarians do not provide these services and thus details about the case need to be discussed with clients early on in the case to make necessary arrangements. Pet Hospice Case Managers provide owners with information regarding veterinarians who provide in-home euthanasia services, body care options, and other methods of memorializing their pet. Case Managers offer to help schedule a euthanasia appointment with the veterinarian and to be present with the family during the euthanasia procedure.

Although the number of cases has grown, the number of volunteers exceeds the number of cases presented. It can be challenging to maintain the interest of the volunteers without providing an opportunity to work face-to-face with a client. To maintain volunteer engagement, volunteers attend debriefing sessions in which active and previous cases are discussed. During these sessions Case Managers provide the group with a summary of the case, challenges, and lessons learned. Additionally, training sessions provide students with valuable information pertaining to end-of-life care, including pain management, client communication, and in-home nursing care. As Pet Hospice becomes established in the community, we foresee the caseload increasing to a number that will consistently provide all volunteers with an opportunity to serve as a case manager. During summer months and holidays when many veterinary students are out of town, Pet Hospice has encountered periods of time with

decreased volunteers available to handle incoming cases, so students worked multiple cases at once.

With any novel program, it takes time to achieve “buy in” within the community. Hospice care for pets is a relatively new concept nationally and veterinarians may not consider offering hospice care for their patients. Some veterinarians may not be aware of the concept of hospice for companion animals or the existence of a regional program. Others may be resistant to offering Pet Hospice to their clients because of a misunderstanding of the hospice philosophy. Sometimes the term “hospice” is associated with palliative care in which euthanasia is not an option. The goal of the Pet Hospice program is to support pet owners and their families as they transition from a terminal diagnosis to the death of their pet. The decision to euthanize is solely that of the client and Pet Hospice volunteers support the decision they make in conjunction with their veterinarian. Pet Hospice offers in-clinic educational presentations to veterinarians and provides information for their clients. Responses to local publications and word of mouth about the program have indicated a tremendous interest by the public and it is often the client that approaches their veterinarian about CSU Pet Hospice care.

Over time there appears to be a strong community interest in hospice care for companion animals. Pets are considered family members, and clients are seeking out methods to keep their companions comfortable in their old age and services such as hospice care. It is the goal of Pet Hospice to continue to develop the program in the local community as well as provide resources and support for those interested in providing hospice care within their own community. The program established a set of protocols and guidelines for hospice care as a model for development of other animal hospice programs. The Pet Hospice program at CSU has been successful in providing a learning opportunity for veterinary students, a community

service, and served as a national resource. It is one of our continuing goals to ensure quality of care for terminally ill companion animals.

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AUTHOR INFORMATION

Gail A. Bishop, BS, is Clinical Coordinator for the Argus Institute for Families and Veterinary Medicine, 300 W. Drake Rd, Fort Collins, CO 80523.

Christie C. Long, DVM is Associate Veterinarian at VCA Ft Collins Animal Hospital, 344 E. Foothills Pkwy, #22, Fort Collins, CO 80525.

Kelly S. Carlsten, BS, is a fourth year professional veterinary medicine student in the College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences at Colorado State University, 300 W. Drake Rd, Fort Collins, CO 80523.

Katie C. Kennedy, BS, is a third year professional veterinary medicine student in the College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences at Colorado State University, 300 W. Drake Rd, Fort Collins, CO 80523. Email: pethosp@colostate.edu

Jane R. Shaw, DVM, PhD, is the Director of the Argus Institute and Assistant Professor of Veterinary Communication at Colorado State University, James L. Voss Veterinary Teaching Hospital, 300 W. Drake Rd, Fort Collins, CO 80523.