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Carrie Kearns, Companion Animal Bereavement Counsellor and tutor for Innovet CPD Training. She spent 16 years as a veterinary care assistant in practice and moved into bereavement counselling full time 3 years ago. Her aspirations are to change how the world sees companion animal and other animal losses. To bring awareness to the pain and loss and support needed. To be the best Companion Animal Bereavement Counsellor she can be. Quirky fact about Carrie is that she has a birthmark in the shape of a hamster! Email: carrie@animalbereavementcounselling.com

Euthanasia: how to cope with the losses

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Death is something that we will see on a regular basis. Wherever you are in your journey to becoming a Veterinary Nurse, the loss of a patient will always be hard.

You will be asked to assist with euthanasia appointments, where you will witness the taking of that pet's life. The ending of their suffering or potential for suffering. You will see clients that scream and even faint. You will see clients that are inconsolable. You will see the elderly clients, the young couples, the singles. The clients who just want it over. The clients who cannot stay and with a trembling hand stroke their pet one more time and then rush out. You are present for the most painful moment in that owner's life. You are witnessing them at their most vulnerable.

My golden rule and it is more common sense than anything else, is to never be more upset than the owner. You are there to be the support they need, and they should not feel as if they need to reign in their own emotions. There is a quote by Shakespeare that explains 'tears show their love but want their remedies' in other words tears are ok but they ask for comfort which takes attention away from the ones who need it.

So, how do you prepare for a euthanasia? Whether it is planned or a routine appointment that turns into a euthanasia, below are some ways you can help yourself and the clients:

1. Remember that there are worse things than death.
2. That living a life of mental and or physical suffering is no life at all.
3. That we can offer a patient a dignified death, that we can make as painless as possible.
4. Take a deep breath before you go in, focus on the fact that this is in the best interests of the patient.
5. Euthanasia is a valid treatment option, it is the result we find hard to deal with, but euthanasia can be the only viable option.
6. You are there for the client, the support they need currently.
7. You cannot judge a situation based on a snapshot in time during the consultation. You are not living the owner's life you have

no idea why they came to the decision for euthanasia. Just know that the patient is going to pass with love, dignity and be saved from the potential for suffering or uncertainty.

8. Cry. If you need to have a good cry afterwards, let it all out. Then splash water on your face, take a deep breath, look in the mirror and see the nurse that just helped a patient pass with dignity.
9. If you feel the urge to cry in the room with the owner try to follow their lead, do you know them well enough to cry softly with them? Are they trying to hold it in? Do they look like they need someone to just gently nod and let them let go?
10. Never be more upset than the client. You are the support they need to get through this and if you are more upset it takes the focus from them
11. Euthanasia IS saving them. For some patients, euthanasia is saving them from pain or potential psychological harm.
12. Talk about it. If you are finding it hard to cope with seeing loss regularly, please talk about it to a colleague you trust. There is no shame in finding it hard. It does not mean you are not a good nurse, seeing loss regularly does affect you.
13. Remember that you did all you could, sometimes clients refuse options given to them and you have to accept that you cannot change their minds and that all you can do is offer their pet the peace they need.

We show so much love and kindness to patients, silly voices, nicknames, fussing, treats. Why wouldn't we be welling up? Welling up, having a dab at a stray tear are acceptable, loud crying and wailing is most definitely not. Crying does not mean you are too sensitive; it does not mean you should not be doing this job. It means you care, and you are human.

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