



Mobile Euthanasia



Meet the Veterinarians

Carrie La Jeunesse, DVM, CT, CCFE, has performed pet euthanasia house calls for 22 years. She provides general medical, surgical, emergency and critical care in Washington State. Dr. La Jeunesse provides private bereavement support and is certified in thanatology. She is also certified as a compassion fatigue educator and is past president of the Washington State Veterinary Medical Association.

Maija Mikkola Curtis, DVM, offers home-based euthanasia as one of the medical services available from Harbor Veterinary House Calls, based in Massachusetts. Harbor Vets was voted Best Vets in Boston by Tails Readers' Choice Awards in 2009 and 2010.

Once something read about only in James Herriot memoirs, house calls from veterinarians are an increasingly requested service. Two veterinarians discuss what is possibly the most challenging kind of house call there is—home euthanasia for companion animals.

Why Offer Mobile Euthanasia?

Drs. La Jeunesse and Curtis agree that clients are extremely concerned with the comfort of their pets. No one wants to move a dying companion that is in pain. Allowing a cherished pet to experience its last moments surrounded by family in a familiar environment is important to owners opting for at-home euthanasia. La Jeunesse notes that some clients want to

create a personal ritual around a pet's passing that they feel more comfortable conducting at home.

Greatest Reward

La Jeunesse is always grateful to be "present" for the death of another living being where she can provide support during the family's last time together. It's been her experience that clients who appreciate home euthanasia services view their veterinarians as

particularly understanding and compassionate; this creates goodwill and trust that are the foundation of building both new and lasting doctor-client relationships. Curtis most appreciates the opportunity to save the owner, the family, and the patient from the typical stress of the final trip to a hospital.

Is It Right for Your Clinic?

Curtis notes that client demand for this service is strong, and La Jeunesse concurs, "You can definitely fill a niche service with this end-of-life gift, and the clients are always very grateful."

"[But] as powerful an experience as this is emotionally and spiritually, it's still a business. And you have to be careful to state *all* costs in advance, and ensure

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payment,” says La Jeunesse. Curtis also points out that travel time can be greater and more complicated than one might expect. Both doctors agree that this highly regulated service should not be practiced unless all federal Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) laws regarding pharmaceutical transportation, record-keeping, and storage are followed precisely.

Here are some critical questions to address with your team when discussing whether mobile euthanasia should be added to your practice:

- Whose clients will you serve? Your established clients or clients from practices within your community?
- How will you prepare your team to manage these cases? How will they address the “sight unseen” case? If it isn't a current client, the veterinarian needs to discuss with the pet owner whether the time is right for euthanasia.
- Will appointments be scheduled during office hours or after office hours? What about travel time? What about time involved when it “didn't go the way I planned?”
- What are the support staff needs of the veterinarian?
- What tools and drugs will be needed? Can DEA regulations be followed?
- How will charges be determined? What is really involved in setting fees? How will payment be ensured?

- Large pets can be heavy. What aftercare arrangements will be offered? How will the body be handled and cared for?
- Is every veterinarian in the practice interested and able to provide this delicate service?

Is It Right for You?

According to La Jeunesse, “Any veterinarian who can perform euthanasia in an exam room can technically perform the same procedure at a client's home. The more critical factor is personal in nature—social graces, empathy, patience, willingness to take time to let a client reminisce if he/she chooses, and being comfortable with displays of emotion that may be more intense than those observed in a practice setting.” Curtis argues that one cannot be a perfectionist. “This is not an office setting. You might not have the right lighting or even be indoors. And you'll definitely have to be comfortable with people when they're very emotional.”

Looking Down the Road: The Future of Mobile Euthanasia

Curtis believes this service will increase. “We're shadowing human medicine, making a kinder death for living beings.” La Jeunesse similarly expresses an optimistic view. “I hope that's the case. It would indicate the public is accepting death as a part of life, and no longer something to be so afraid of.”



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[TREATS]



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