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QUALITY OF LIFE WORKSHEET

The decision to pursue additional medical treatments or consider euthanasia for a sick or chronically ill pet is a hard decision to make for most pet owners. This handout has been designed to help you rationally evaluate the quality of life of your pet over time. The handouts are designed to be repeated on a regular basis to track subtle changes over time.

Dogs and cats are creatures of habit. In general they all have a few favorite things that give them a purpose in their life and which make them happy. For many animals it is food that motivates them, for others it may be playing ball, hiking or going for car rides or just being in the middle of family activities. Cats may enjoy napping on their favorite chair, watching the birds through the window, sitting in their owner's lap or unrolling all of the rolls of toilet paper in your bathroom.

Today's Date _____

First, take the time to list your pet's Top 4 favorite things to do in life. If you have a geriatric or sick pet list their favorite things to do when they were in their prime. If they are no longer doing these things note whether you think it is a permanent or temporary change in their behavior.

Temporary Permanent Unsure

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

4 _____

The inability or the loss of desire of your pet to do one or more of these things is one of **THE MOST IMPORTANT FACTORS** in deciding how good your pet's quality of life is at this moment in time. **Next**, take the time to evaluate the different components of life which are listed in the sections below. These are contributing factors in determining your pet's comfort or happiness

Write down what percentage of each day you feel your pet appears comfortable and happy _____

Each time you do this worksheet compare this percentage. Is it getting worse over time?

Read each of the following questions in the next 9 sections and write down a score from 0-5 based on your own perception of your pet.

A score of 0 (zero) means this question does not apply to your pet, a score of 5 means the condition is as severe as it could be.

If

1. PAIN:

Pain is a major factor which will decrease an animal's quality of life. Many animals do not verbalize or act obviously painful particularly if the pain is caused by a chronic problem instead they tend to withdraw, hide, or remain immobile. Many animals hide their discomfort which is a survival mechanism passed down from their ancestors. Below are some of the pain responses you are more likely to see.

Consider the following:

- My pet appears to hurt or be in pain or is withdrawn and avoiding interactions.
- My pet limps. (If it didn't hurt, they wouldn't limp.)
- My pet pants frequently, even at rest.
- My pet's respirations are forced, exaggerated, or otherwise not normal.
- My pet licks repeatedly at one site on his/her body or at a site of a cancer/tumor.
- My pet guards or protects an area of his/her body
- My animal's posture or gait is abnormal or different than normal. (arched back/shuffling/balance loss/using leg abnormally/walking stiffly/seems weak /reluctant to move/difficulty rising or sitting)
- My pet shakes or trembles sometimes during rest.
- My pet is on pain medication and yet he still seems uncomfortable.
- My pet is more likely to snap or bite when I touch him. This is a new behavior.
- My pet is extremely restless and constantly pacing due to the pain. **(multiply score x 2)**

Possible medical or nursing interventions may include: starting pain medications, increasing the dose or adding additional pain medications to your pet's current regimen based on your veterinarian's advice, non-traditional medicine (acupuncture, physical therapy), surgical intervention if appropriate. Always be sure that the underlying disease/condition has been treated properly first - consider a second opinion to reaffirm your pet's current diagnoses.

Severe pain which is unrelenting or rapidly progressive despite the use of medical or surgical interventions should prompt a decision to euthanize

2. BREATHING:

Breathing is imperative to life. Having difficulty breathing can be frightening and debilitating to animals. Do not underestimate how quickly breathing issues can progress, how rapidly they can become fatal, or how scary this can be for an animal. Many people do not understand that 'increased work of breathing' is seen as an increase in the amount of movement of the chest wall or of the abdomen. This is a strong indication that your pet is struggling to breathe at some level.

Consider the following:

___ My pet is restless and cannot comfortably lie down and cannot lie down in certain positions.
(multiple your score x 2)

___ My pet's respiratory effort (the amount of work it takes to breathe) is not normal. Increased movement of the thorax or of the abdomen are examples of working harder to breathe.

___ My pet cannot breathe with his/her mouth shut or is making loud noises as he breathes.

___ My pet quickly collapses or breathes heavy with exercise

___ The sounds that my pet makes in breathing are getting louder over time.

___ Attempts to move or exercise create an appearance of panic, an increase in panting/gasping or an increase in the amount of work it takes to breathe.

Possible medical or nursing interventions include: Medications, corrective surgery, oxygen support, or nebulizing therapy.

Gasping to breathe, excessively working hard to breathe, excessive fatigue from breathing should either prompt an emergency trip to a veterinary hospital for immediate medical care or euthanasia

3. APPETITE:

Appetite is one of the most obvious signs of wellness. Most animals are vigorous eaters. The loss of interest in food is a strong indicator that there is a problem.

Consider the following:

___ My pet doesn't eat his/her normal food anymore.

___ My pet picks at his/her food now but never did this in the past.

___ My pet walks over to his/her food and looks at it but won't eat or walks away

___ My pet doesn't even want the special foods -treats, human foods, snacks - anymore.

___ My pet acts nauseated or vomits when food is offered.

___ My pet is losing weight without a valid cause.

___ My pet is not eating at all. (If it is for more than 3 days multiple score x2)

Possible medical or nursing interventions include: hand feeding, heating food, adding moisture by soaking food or using canned varieties, careful addition of human foods, syringe feeding, stomach tube placement, medications for appetite stimulation, medications to reduce nauseousness.

4. HYDRATION:

Hydration status is equally important as appetite. Without adequate water consumption, your pet can become dehydrated. Dehydration can contribute to weakness and not feeling well.

Consider the following:

- My pet doesn't drink as much as he/she used to.
- My pet frequently has dry, sticky gums.
- My pet has persistent vomiting or has diarrhea (fluid loss contributes to dehydration)
- My pet drinks excessively or his consumption of water is increasing over time.

Possible medical or nursing interventions include: add moisture to the diet, subcutaneous fluid administration, medications to control vomiting or diarrhea, bloodwork and a urinalysis to identify treatable medical problems.

5. HYGIENE:

Animals that don't feel well, especially cats, do not have the energy to maintain normal hair and skin.

Consider the following:

- My cat doesn't groom herself any more.
- My pet's hair is matted, greasy, rough looking, dull, or foul smelling.
- My pet has stool pasted around his/her rectum or in his/her hair.
- My pet smells like urine or has skin irritation from urine.
- My pet has pressure sores/wounds that won't heal
- My pet urinates or defecates where he sleeps or when he/she is walking because he has trouble standing up to do so or because he is now regularly incontinent.

Possible medical or nursing interventions include: regular brushing and grooming, frequent bedding changes, frequent sanitary baths, pain medication or adequate padding for areas where the pet spends a lot of time, appropriate wound care, treat the underlying disease/condition.

6. ACTIVITY/MOBILITY:

Changes in normal activity can be due to mobility problems, pain, illness, excessive weight or aging (arthritis).

Consider the following:

- My pet cannot get up or lie down without assistance.
- My pet had a hard time getting around and/or limps and walks slowly/stiffly all the time.
- My pet lays in one place all day long.
- My pet does not want to play ball, go for walks, or do the things he/she used to do.
- My pet falls frequently
- Because of my pet's arthritic or spinal cord disease he is now incontinent at times.

Possible medical or nursing interventions include: addition of pain medication(s) or dose adjustment, physical therapy, surgical intervention, acupuncture, weight loss.

7. HAPPINESS/MENTAL STATUS:

Consider the following:

- My pet does not express joy and interest in life.
- My pet does not respond to the people that he/she used to respond to.
- My pet does not want to play with toys or do other things that he/she used to enjoy.
- My pet seems dull, not alert, or depressed.

8. GENERAL BEHAVIOR PATTERNS

Changes in normal behavioral patterns are often a key indicator of how well an animal feels.

Consider the following:

- My pet is hiding or sleeping in odd places.
- My pet doesn't greet me when I come home and he/she used to.
- My pet is overly clingy and is following me around and he/she never used to do this.
- My other pets are treating this pet differently they are overly attentive or ignoring him/her completely.
- My pet doesn't care about what is going on around him/her.

9. OWNER PERCEPTIONS

Many times an owner is aware that their pet is suffering but does not want to give up on their pet.

Consider the following:

- If I were in a similar situation I would not want to live
- I would be painful if I had this condition.
- I have made appointments for euthanasia for my pet but I cancelled/didnt show up.
- I am holding onto my pet for some sentimental reason. (ex. the pet belonged to a now deceased family member, the pet helped me through a hard time in my life, etc.)
- My pet is having more bad days than good days.

If your pet's score is greater than 180 than your pet's quality of life is not ideal.

If your pet's score is over 220 he or she is likely not happy. Euthanasia should be considered.

Make notes about your pet's specific medical condition. Speak to your family veterinarian about potential medical solutions for your pet's illness.

Print off this sheet and repeat the survey at regular intervals to compare - perhaps weekly for animals who are close to their life's end, monthly for animals with a progressive disease problem, tri-annually for geriatric animals. This will allow you to see the progressive changes in your pet's condition which are more subtle and help you to make rational decisions based on these observations.

