

8.1 Summary

The euthanasia of dogs and cats in a small animal veterinary practice

In this practice the portion of euthanasias amounts to 0.5 per cent of all veterinary services of one year. In spite of this apparently low numerical value the performance of euthanasia is an enormously demanding job for the veterinarian and his practice team. It is essential to save the animal from a serious deterioration of its general condition with suffering and pain, often occurring with the foreseeable oncoming death. Here the viewpoint of the pet owner and the veterinarian is mostly a different one. It behooves the veterinary to master the tightrope walk between animal, pet owner and law. The sum of all considerations results for the veterinarian in a destruction obligation or a prohibition of destruction for the concrete animal. The veterinary shall not and cannot always comply with the wish of pet owners to euthanize their animal.

Apart from certain tumor diseases, malformations, euthanasia required by a veterinary inspector or traumata mostly not one single clearly to be defined diagnosis is the reason for euthanasia, but rather the concentration of clinical indications and symptoms. Complexes like a very bad general condition due to old age, diseases with an infaust prognosis, diseases with considerable pains as well as disturbed behaviour and aggressions belong to this.

The advantages and disadvantages of performing euthanasia in the veterinary practice or at home are discussed in relation to the own examination results.

In the study at hand the following aspects among other ones show up and are discussed:

- In spring there is generally an increase of euthanasias due to traumatic reasons.
- Only until autumn, in the warmer months, dogs and cats were euthanized because of "diseases with considerable pains".
- Continuously distributed over the year euthanasias were performed because of a very bad general condition due to old age.
- From April until June the amount of euthanized dogs and cats increased, as well as in January. Possible seasonal relations are explained.
- Male dogs and cats were more often euthanized due to diseases with considerable pains than female animals.
- With big dog breeds, in contrast to small and middle-sized breeds, traumatic incidents and disturbed behaviour rather led to euthanasia.

- Male dog owners, in contrast to male cat owners, needed more time for decision-making.
- Significantly more dog owners, in contrast to cat owners, "asked for advice in time".
- With cat owners 6 per cent were "uninterested" pet owners. With dog owners our investigations could not find any "uninterested" owner.
- Dog owners, compared with cat owners, showed the higher percentage of "demanding" pet owners.
- Toward weekend the number of "demanding" cat owners increased.
- Generally, cats were less regularly presented by their owners in the veterinary practice during their lives than dogs.
- Generally, cat owners decided faster than dog owners to realize an impending euthanasia.
- Most pet owners prefer to wait in the waiting room or, even more often, outside the building, while euthanasia is performed.
- Most euthanasias were performed on Monday and in the morning.
- Three quarters of the dog-owning families preferred a house visit.
- 75 per cent of all euthanized dogs and cats were buried in their own graves.

Despite all correct charging possibilities the commitment of the veterinarian and his team within the scope of euthanasia will not be able to be measured in monetary value. Day by day, at any time, surveying and appropriate decisions with far-reaching consequences have to be made. This veterinary field of work is marked by above-average commitment, courageous behaviour, the willingness to bring full commitment, again and again, with all strength and at the most impossible times as well as much sympathetic understanding of continuously newly arising and different situations.