

# Growing industry – hospice care for dogs

By Matt Richtel, New York Times

More and more, cats and dogs get the human treatment. There are pet spas, pet therapists, pet clothes. And as it goes in life, so it now goes in the twilight. The latest phenomenon: pet hospice.

Around the country, a growing number of veterinarians are offering hospice care, and marketing it as a way to give cats and dogs – and their owners – a less anxious, more comfortable passing.

The approach, in the spirit of the human variety, entails ceasing aggressive medical treatment and giving pain and even anti-anxiety drugs. Unlike in hospice care for humans, euthanasia is an option – and in fact, is a big part of this end-of-life turn. When it's time, the vet performs it in the living room, bedroom or wherever the family feels comfortable.

That's a big part of the job, the vets say, relieving pet owner guilt, giving them an emotional bridge to a pet's death, and letting them grieve at home – rather than in a clinic or animal shelter. The intimacy carries a premium, sometimes costing 25 percent or more than euthanasia in a clinic. Vets, and their customers, say it can be worth it.

"They're in their own environment, not only the pet but the owners," said Dr. Mary Gardner, co-founder of Lap of Love, a Florida-based company that is one of the leaders in a small but growing market. "They're allowed to have other animals present, other cats or dogs present, other children," added Gardner, who refers to a pet's owner as its "mom" or "dad," and has since relocated her own practice to Los Angeles. "I've been to some homes where they had barbecues for that dog, and

invited me and the neighbors, and the dog was the man of the hour.”

Lap of Love’s business has blossomed since 2010 from two providers to more than 68 vet partners in 18 states. The International Association for Animal Hospice and Palliative Care, a group started in 2009, now has 200 members, mostly vets, but also several family therapists, lawyers and an animal sanctuary in Northern California that takes in and provides holistic healing and hospice for terminally ill and elderly pets.

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