

The Changing Landscape of End-of-Life Pet Care

By Tyler Stewart

The saddest and most difficult truth of pet ownership is coping with the loss of a loved one who has become part of the family. Losing a beloved pet companion is a strange and emotionally challenging time for pet owners, and many do not know all of their options; whether those options surround palliative or afterlife care.

The good news is the veterinary landscape has evolved tremendously over the last decade and the options for caring for ailing pets at home has seen wonderful progress. With the guidance of your veterinarian, or a veterinarian specializing in pet hospice, many pet owners can see a pet's life comfortably extended days, weeks, or in some cases, months with terminal diagnoses. Our pets do not display symptoms of chronic pain like humans, so at the first signs of serious behavioral changes it is important to contact a qualified veterinary professional.

Unfortunately, there are times when palliative care is not in the best interest of the pet or the pet's family. While there is no substitute for the opinion of trained medical professionals, there are tools available for assessing the quality of life for your pets. One of the most common resources pet parents use to help them make more objective decisions around their furry companion's quality of life is the Villalobos Quality of Life Scale (A link to the Villalobos Scale may be found at www.HeavenlyPawsAtlanta.com/faq-s).

Once the choice of euthanasia or hospice has been made, or the pet passes at home, the decision around who provides your pet's aftercare is next. Afterlife care decisions are just as important as choosing the right veterinarian, boarding facility, or groomer. While your veterinarian will typically help guide you through the afterlife care process, the final decision of who provides this important care for your pet is up to you.

Unfortunately, the responsibility for knowing which aftercare facility your vet partners with, their reputation, their costs, and their commitment to the pet's they serve rests solely on the pet parents. Just as it is important for us to have conversations with loved ones around what we want for our own afterlife care, it is important to discuss and know what you want for your pets too. Doing your research and making decisions ahead of time will make receiving aftercare more efficient when all you will want to do is grieve and be with loved ones. Moreover, many aftercare facilities offer pre-planning services to help counsel and guide you.

As the aftercare landscape changes, burial and cremation are no longer the only options. What's more, did you know pet burial in the backyard may be illegal or against the bylaws of your HOA? Burial is always illegal on government owned land or parks. The best alternative to cremation or a difficult (potentially illegal) burial is Aquamation. Aquamation is a gentle & green alternative to cremation using water and alkali to reduce the body to the same mineral ash one would receive from a traditional crematory.

Recently, one of the first Aquamation facilities in the country, and the first in Georgia, opened in Norcross. They are called Heavenly Paws Pet Aquamation (online at www.HeavenlyPawsAtlanta.com) and are dedicated to revolutionizing the way afterlife pet care is provided by reducing energy consumption by ninety five percent, offering eco-friendly services eliminating toxic pollution, offering competitive service rates (including packaging for improved value), and an unwavering dedication to helping pet parents through their loss. If you haven't heard of Aquamation you are not alone. It is only in the last few years this service has been adapted commercially for people and pets. Aquamation has been used privately for decades by institutions like The University of Georgia, The Mayo Research Clinic, UCLA, Texas A&M, Duke University and the US Government.

The good news is, thanks to modern veterinary care, our pets are living longer than ever, so most pet parents have to make end-of-life care decisions less frequently. With their longer lives, pets give us so much more – more smiles, more love, and ultimately more tears at the end. Because of all they give us, it is important to honor them at the end by knowing your options and with the best, most loving care available.

