Experiences and attitudes to small animal euthanasia consultations

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OBJECTIVES

Euthanasia consultations are a frequent reality for the majority of first opinion, small animal vets and require a wide range of skills. A study is being conducted to explore veterinary surgeon and client experiences, and opinions, of what happens in companion animal consults. The aim of this abstract is to report the findings in relation to euthanasia consultations.

METHODS

A convenience sample of veterinary surgeons and clients were invited to participate in focus groups and

semi-structured interviews between January and June 2017. Data was transcribed intelligent verbatim and a thematic analysis was completed. The results presented are from one emergent theme, euthanasia.

RESULTS

Twenty-one focus groups (thirteen vet, eight client) and three semi-structured interviews (clients) were undertaken. Euthanasia was raised in discussion in a large proportion of the groups, always by the participants. Vets discussed utilising a different approach to euthanasia consultations when compared to other types of consultations including employing alternative communication and decision making styles. Many vets reported supporting a client's decision to euthanase despite the availability of alternative treatment or management options. Clients discussed seeking reassurance from vets when making euthanasia decisions and reported a strong preference for veterinary input and a shared decision. In addition, clients discussed the importance of whole practice support and empathy following a euthanasia.

STATEMENT (CONCLUSIONS)

These results highlight the importance of euthanasia consultations in small animal practice but more research is required to gain greater understanding. A greater understanding of how they are different from other consultations warrants further exploration.

Collateral damage: what is it like to own an osteoarthritic dog?

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OBJECTIVES

Osteoarthritis is a common disease of older dogs. Many publications describe diagnostic and treatment options, but few data are available about the impact on owners of living with affected dogs. The research question for this qualitative study was 'What is it like to own an osteoarthritic dog?'

METHODS

Between February and August 2014, semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted with owners of osteoarthritic dogs managed in general practice. Owners described all aspects of what it was like to live with,

and make decisions about, a dog with osteoarthritis. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Thematic analysis identified the emergent theme 'collateral damage' which describes the impact on owners of this disease.

RESULTS

Forty owners of 35 affected dogs were interviewed. All described increased constraints on their time and daily activities, and an increased sense of responsibility following their dogs' diagnosis. Impacts included a reduction in their own exercise levels, household-wide restrictions to location and frequency of holidays or days out, and daily stress associated with making decisions about how to manage their dogs' disease. A few described multiple challenges of owning both affected and unaffected dogs. Some owners compared their life with an osteoarthritic dog with being the primary carer of a loved, co-habiting elderly relative.

STATEMENT (CONCLUSIONS)

This research demonstrates that this common disease affects the lives of owners as well as their dogs. General practitioners should consider discussing with owners both the feasibility and potential impacts of treatment or management recommendations, and ensure support is available to help owners with difficult decisions.