Poster presentations

An ethical decision-making tool for veterinarians to avoid 'convenience euthanasia' of companion animals

Alice Oven

University of Winchester, Winchester, United Kingdom

OBJECTIVES

The concept of 'convenience euthanasia' is an increasing ethical concern in the veterinary profession and vets are often left without clear guidelines for when it is and is not ethical to euthanise. This ethical decision-making tool is developed with the aim of aiding veterinarians facing this scenario.

METHODS

The proposed ethical decision-making flowchart involves four steps: (1) Identifying whether euthanasia is in the

best interests of the patient) (2) Identifying stakeholders: the patient, client(s), veterinarian and any other parties involved (3) Determining the information and evidence required to make a decision, and (4) Using ethical frameworks to make a considered judgement (the veterinarian is given five key models — utilitarian, deontological, ethics of care, virtue ethics and contractarian — to aid them in their decision).

RESULTS

Convenience euthanasia is defined, and concepts such as 'Death as a welfare issue', 'Pets as "custodial property"' and 'Applied veterinary ethics' are discussed, along with possible negative outcomes of refusing euthanasia and alternative options/advice for clients. A detailed ethical decision-making tool is provided taking these topics into account.

STATEMENT (CONCLUSIONS)

Rebuelto describes the convenience euthanasia situation as 'probably one of the most stressful for a veterinarian' (2008). Knight states that many vets continue to be haunted by 'wrong' decisions (2016), linking this to high rates of stress and suicide in the profession. It is therefore imperative that veterinarians have tools to support them in making these difficult choices. This poster offers one such tool.

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