



# BrightHaven Vet Discussion Guidance: Navigating a Terminal Diagnosis

***PLEASE NOTE:** We at BrightHaven are not veterinarians and are therefore not qualified to give you professional veterinary advice. We have, however, been helping our animals holistically for many years, aided by numerous talented professional practitioners. Also, we have been through the dying experience with more than 600 animals and are proud to share what we've learned from our experiences along the way.*

Your beloved has just received a terminal diagnosis, and sometimes that may be given along with a recommendation for euthanasia.

First and foremost, it's very important to take a deep breath and try to remain centered – something that is not easy for us to do when fear and panic are creeping in and thoughts begin to race, and most especially when one of our most adored family member's life is threatened.

We must try to remember that a terminal diagnosis most often does not mean that death is imminent and sometimes, with a change to healthcare and lifestyle, life can be prolonged.



*Joey (left) & Sammi*

**Unless your animal is in an acute situation,** consider taking your animal home to give everyone time to make a fully informed decision as to care, treatment, hospice care, natural death or euthanasia

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## Discussion Guidance – Making an Urgent Euthanasia Decision

*This section gives the basic and most important questions that need immediate answers to help determine if euthanasia is needed **NOW** due to the animal's current situation, which may be acute.*

- ✦ What is the diagnosis? Please explain it to me clearly and thoroughly.
  - It is the vet's responsibility to share a realistic prognosis.
- ✦ Can care be managed at home?
  - Pain meds, other drugs? Is oxygen necessary?
  - What else is needed to maintain life in order for me to think things through?

Be sure that your veterinarian understands you are not disrespecting or rejecting his advice; if it's at all possible, you're simply wishing to take a little time to discuss with the family to help ensure you are making the right choice for everyone. Ideally, you do not want to make the decision for euthanasia in the midst of an emotionally charged moment, although acute situations may require an immediate decision.

Realize too that some vets may gently push euthanasia for a variety of reasons, including their own, very human fears around dying and death.

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## Discussion Guidance – Urgent Euthanasia Decision NOT Needed

Assuming the decision for euthanasia has not been an urgent need, we'll look at the questions that need answering by your veterinarian in order to have a clear picture of the situation.

But first we'd like to share a few reminders:

- ✦ You are facing a journey of love and education.
- ✦ The more you know, the better choices you can make and the lower the fear.
- ✦ Some things you can control. You can choose your thoughts and how you respond.
- ✦ Try to let go of what you cannot control.

**Remember** you are only gathering information at this stage to enable you to decide the best way forward for you, your animal and your situation.

- ✦ Get the facts of the diagnosis. Ask for everything to be written down, as well as verbally explained, if needed.
  - Remember: It is the vet's responsibility to share a realistic prognosis and discuss anticipated outcomes with the family.
- ✦ Do not allow yourself to be frightened by medical terminology.
- ✦ If possible, make your own notes too, to enhance clarity.
- ✦ Be sure you understand all the information and ask for explanations of anything that's not clear to you.
- ✦ Next, find out as much as you can about your animal's condition, and what treatment options may be available to you.
- ✦ Ask if surgery is an option or recommended.
- ✦ Ask if a 2<sup>nd</sup> opinion or specialist's input might be an appropriate consideration and if so, request a practitioner recommendation.
  - Sometimes a condition diagnosed by your vet should be assessed by a specialist more familiar with a particular condition.

To help you better understand the implications of taking your animal home, here are additional questions to ask related to the diagnosis and medical care:

- ✦ What medications are recommended?
- ✦ What do they do and what may be their side effects?
- ✦ What, if any, medications, especially for pain, should be taken home right away?
- ✦ What would the daily care regimen entail?
- ✦ Are current symptoms likely to multiply or intensify?
- ✦ What new symptoms may likely be encountered?
- ✦ Is pain present now or expected as a part of the medical condition?
- ✦ How should the pain be treated?
  - An important note is that pain usually does not appear suddenly at the end of life if it has not been a part of the animal's ongoing illness.
    - ❖ However, "side effects" of the dying process such as bed sores (if an immobile patient hasn't been repositioned to prevent them) or uremia caused by the kidneys shutting down may develop that can cause pain, which needs to be immediately addressed.
- ✦ Ask for information and options for holistic, conventional or integrative treatment, as well as end-of-life options, including hospice care.
  - BrightHaven uses primarily holistic care but turns to conventional drugs if and when necessary, making integrative care well worth consideration – that way taking the best from both worlds!
- ✦ Also ask about hospice and palliative care and what type of support your vet offers and/or can refer.
  - One of the most important aspects is the likely costs involved, so please discuss treatment protocol costs, at home hospice or end of life care and also euthanasia costs.

These ARE a lot of questions to ask and if your veterinarian seems unwilling or unable to gather all the information requested, then you may consider finding another veterinarian to assist you.

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## Points for Consideration

- ✦ The veterinarian is trained to do everything possible to save the life.

- ✦ If a veterinarian says, “I can do no more,” it is very often after they have pulled out all the stops to fight manifesting symptoms.
- ✦ It’s important to step back and consider the patient. For example, evaluate palliative/comfort/hospice care versus continuing intervention. What would the patient want?
  - Sometimes palliative/comfort/hospice care may be the better way to go.



*Gail & Beauregard*

## For You, the Caregiver

- ✦ You are facing a journey of love and education.
- ✦ The more you know, the better choices you can make and the lower the fear.
- ✦ Some things you can control; you can choose your thoughts and how you respond.
- ✦ Try to let go of what you cannot control.

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## For More Information

If you’d like more detailed information to help you to navigate a terminal diagnosis, including choosing care options and making the right decision for your unique situation:

**BOOKLET:** *Follow Your Heart: Navigating a Terminal Diagnosis*, written by BrightHaven President and Founder by Gail Pope, available on Amazon at <https://amzn.to/2YxnXCz>.

If you purchase this booklet via <https://smile.amazon.com> and select BrightHaven as your favorite charitable organization, Amazon will donate a percentage of the sale price to BrightHaven, which will help us help more animals and the people who love them!

**ONLINE COURSE:** BrightHaven Holistic Animal Hospice: Navigating a Terminal Diagnosis, available at <http://bit.ly/bright-online-learning>.

Our wish for both the course and the booklet is to hold your hand and help you to navigate this path with a deeper sense of peace, confidence and clarity. Gail drew on her consultations with countless distressed caregivers who have reached out to her after receiving such a diagnosis for their animal.

**BOOK A CONSULTATION:** Have questions about how BrightHaven’s holistic healing or animal hospice care approaches can help your animal? Wish to discuss end-of-life options with someone both experienced and compassionate? Book a consultation with President and Founder Gail Pope by sending an email to [consultations@brighthaven.org](mailto:consultations@brighthaven.org).

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## About BrightHaven

Founded in 1990 by Gail and Richard Pope, BrightHaven is a renowned animal rescue, hospice and holistic education center. Our primary focus: senior, disabled and chronically ill animals, a vulnerable population that has an overwhelming need to find love and care in our society. BrightHaven is a pioneer and leader in the ever-expanding field of animal hospice, and our experience with hospice-supported natural dying is distinct and well known. We are privileged to have provided hospice care for and shared the dying experience with over 600 animals who taught us so much. At BrightHaven, it *IS* all about living well through the last breath!