**The Decision**

One of the hardest things we do as pet owners is watching them age and worry that we are doing everything we can for them. There may come a time when we wonder if we are extending their suffering too far. Making the decision is often a difficult and emotional process that many describe as heartbreaking or the hardest thing they have ever had to do. Others may feel immense guilt or procrastinate and avoid making the decision altogether. Although it’s difficult, planning a euthanasia for your ailing pet is usually the kindest and most humane thing that you can do. Some people have a difficult time with the thought of euthanasia. Keep in mind that the illness, disease, or injury is causing the end of life, not you.

**Quality of Life Scorecard**

Dr. Alice Villalobos, the veterinarian who started Pawspice, a quality of life program for terminal pets,has published a scoring system for life quality called The HHHHHMM scale. The letters stand for: Hurt, Hunger, Hydration, Hygiene, Happiness, Mobility, and More Good Days than Bad.

\*\*This is just another tool to be used to help put qualifiers on some lines that can get blurry during these situations. This system is not an absolute; it is just meant to help your objectivity. Pet caregivers can use this Quality of Life Scale to help determine if it’s the right time.

Score patients using a scale of 1 to 10. (1=no/disagree; 10=yes/agree).

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| **Score** | **Criterion** |
| 1 – 10 | **HURT** – First and foremost on the scale: Is pain control adequate? This includes breathing ability. Is the pet’s pain successfully managed? Are extra measures like oxygen necessary? |
| 1 – 10 | **HUNGER** – Is the pet eating enough and getting proper nutrition? Is hand feeding necessary? Does the pet require a feeding tube? |
| 1 – 10 | **HYDRATION** – Is the pet appropriately hydrated? Can they drink enough on their own, or do they require supplementation via subcutaneous or intravenous fluids? |
| 1 – 10 | **HYGIENE** – Can the the pet keep themselves clean? Does it require assistance? (Pets should be brushed and cleaned, particularly after elimination. Appropriate bedding to avoid pressure sores, keep any wounds clean/dressed, etc). |
| 1 – 10 | **HAPPINESS** – Does the pet express joy and interest? Is the pet responsive and interactive to things around him or her (family, toys, etc.)? Is the pet depressed, lonely, anxious, bored or afraid? Can the pet’s bed be close to the family activities and not be isolated? |
| 1 – 10 | **MOBILITY** – Can the pet get up and about? Does the pet need human or mechanical assistance (e.g., a cart)? Does the pet feel like going for a walk? Is the pet having seizures or stumbling? |
| 1 – 10 | **MORE GOOD DAYS THAN BAD** – Do the good hours or days outnumber the bad ones? When bad days outnumber good days, quality of life might be compromised. When a healthy human-animal bond is no longer possible, the caregiver must be made aware the end is near. The decision needs to be made if the pet is suffering. If death comes peacefully and painlessly, that is okay. |
| \*TOTAL | \*A total over 35 points generally represents acceptable life quality |