

COMPANION ANIMAL AFTERCARE

*Handling of Companion Animal Remains
and the Selection of Aftercare Providers*



AN OWNER'S ATTACHMENT

to a companion animal extends beyond its death, therefore the sensitive handling of pet remains is an important aspect of veterinary practice.

Pet owners rely on their veterinarian to perform due diligence in selecting an aftercare provider for their deceased companions. Veterinarians must understand that they may be responsible, and may be held accountable, for the aftercare provider they recommend. Beyond accountability, the reputation of the veterinarian and their relationship with clients may depend on how well they manage this responsibility and respond to any problems that may arise.

COMPANION ANIMAL VETERINARIANS SHOULD

- Handle animal remains in a sensitive manner, such that it is not unnecessarily disturbing to the owner or any other person with a valid reason to see the remains
- Provide adequate containment of the remains.
- Use trustworthy service providers for postmortem care or disposition of remains

VETERINARIANS SELECTING AN AFTERCARE PROVIDER SHOULD CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING

Aftercare providers you work with or refer clients to should be seen to ALWAYS handle pets with dignity and respect. Veterinarians should select providers that handle pets in a sensitive manner such that it is not unnecessarily disturbing to the owner. Failures in this regard should lead to communication between the veterinarian and provider and corrections of the issue or, as necessary, severing of the business relationship.

Aftercare facilities should have an "open door" policy to ensure transparency and opportunity to assess the services offered. The facility should be open to visits by clients, the veterinarian, and/or their staff during regular business hours. Feedback from clients about their experiences with an aftercare provider should be accepted, recorded, and acted upon as necessary.

Facilities may vary greatly but ALL should be clean, organized, and adhere to federal, state, and local laws and regulatory requirements.

Aftercare providers should be able to demonstrate an accurate, reliable “chain of custody” for ALL pets in their care. The aftercare provider should return surgical or non-organic implants upon request.

Providers should, through their own information and resources provided to the veterinarian, allow clients to be well-informed about pet aftercare options.

Veterinarians should familiarize themselves with locally available options. To avoid confusion, standard terms and definitions should be used. The International Cemetery, Cremation, and Funeral Association’s Pet Loss Professionals Alliance has developed standards and definitions in relation to cremation that are available here: <https://iccfa.com/membership/plpa/plpa-documents/>.

Pet remains should be returned or sent to their final disposition in a timely manner.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Encourage prior planning so that owners are aware of their options and can easily communicate their preferences. Preplanning can be offered by the veterinarian or delegated to the aftercare facility.

Many clients are now requesting special memorial services and keepsakes so the aftercare facility should offer preplanning if the veterinarian opts to delegate this important function.

Be aware of all legal restrictions related to the disposition of remains and counsel pet owners accordingly. This is especially important for clients that choose home burial as an aftercare option.

Veterinarians should also utilize client consent forms that specify the aftercare being provided and the disposition of unclaimed remains.

Deceased pets, whenever possible, should be maintained in a condition suitable for return to the owner or to the aftercare providers such that families may witness their pet’s aftercare. If receiving remains following postmortem procedures and/or aftercare, inspect remains upon receipt from the service provider to determine what owners will see if they choose to view the remains, and where possible, to verify that requested services have been properly executed.



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