

Animal Hospice & Palliative Care Experts Gathering in Denver



By Lorraine May, M.A.

Misha May Foundation Dog Training & Rescue

Lovely Lola, Hospice Darling...

Lola, picked up as an unspayed stray at seven years of age, had developed a large cancerous mammary tumor. Lucky for her, she was taken to the Humane Society of South Platte Valley in Englewood where they removed the tumor, hoping for a long life for this sweet happy-go-lucky black Lab. Sadly, the cancer had spread and they began searching for a hospice foster home. I took one look at Lola's face in the e-mail and went to get her. That was over 10 months ago and I cherish each moment we spend together (see photo above). In honor of the lovely Lola, I must add: A female puppy spayed before her first heat cycle can expect never to develop a mammary tumor of any kind. The incidence of tumor development in this group is nearly zero.

Lola isn't my first hospice darling, nor will she be my last. Caring for someone with a terminal diagnosis can bring life into perspective, deepening bonds and giving meaning to each moment. The choice to offer hospice allows us to follow up a terminal diagnosis with compassionate care for as long as the animal has a good quality of life. Without hospice, the often inadequate options only include immediate euthanasia or prolonged suffering.

Complementary Therapies

Recently, I was invited to speak at the 2nd International Association of Animal Hospice and Palliative Care Conference held here in Denver. As a Reiki Master (energy healer), I shared my experience of the positive impact this non-invasive supportive approach can have on animals at all life stages. However, it is especially appropriate in end-of-life cases since no restraint is necessary, touching is optional, and there are no side effects or precautionary measures needed.

Additional complementary-therapy presentations at the conference included acupressure, flower essences, homeopathy, laser therapy

and massage. Many science-based veterinarians remain skeptical, yet open minded regarding these treatments. Because their clients wish to explore every avenue of healing for their best friends, veterinary offices are now more likely to welcome these practitioners and their services as part of the care team.

The Animal Hospice Movement

More mainstream presentations during the conference addressed clients and their needs—such as cultural differences—affecting decision making, crisis management and clear communication. A business management section touched on pet insurance, financial success and marketing. Case studies were presented on many diverse topics.

The Animal Hospice Movement, which began in the 80s, hosted their first international conference in 2011 with 35 attendees. This year's conference brought together over 150 professionals from as far away as Australia and Europe, while the majority of participants arrived from around the U.S. and Canada.

One veterinarian from England stated that she was there to learn from our more sophisticated and established industry. A North Carolina pet-boarding operator, who supplies trained therapy dogs without charge to children appearing in court, plans to incorporate a hospice wing for clients. Jeret Benson, a CSU veterinary student, attended to acquire information on the most effective ways to manage a declining appetite, and how best to incorporate palliative radiation therapy. Understanding that hospice care is a team effort will also expand the practice of Dr. Barry Richman, located north of Seattle.

Many conferees were present to determine how their services might be more readily included in hospice care. Dr. Amy Norton, a local Osteopath from Evergreen, describes her services as energetic chiropractic, allowing her to make adjustments to relieve pain without invasive touch. In memory of her beloved Georgia, Kerry Malak, a Pet Loss Counselor from Wisconsin, offers support and resources for those whose canines have been diagnosed with cancer. Trained as a chaplain, Carol Rowehl of Pennsylvania intends to offer emotional support, but finds veterinary offices reluctant to include her due to concern over client perception of inappropriate religious context. Recently relocated to Lakewood is Toni Ellis, a veterinary technician interested in providing hospice care for feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV) positive cats.

Euthanasia or Natural Death?

Conference attendees were asked to submit their definition of hospice before attending the conference and then to explain how their perception may have been impacted by their participation in this year's conference. This exercise may offer opinions that can help this organization become more fully aligned. While all members embrace pain management and quality of life, their views differ regarding the final decision. One group believes that each animal's situation should dictate whether they will be euthanized or allowed to die naturally. The other faction firmly believes that each animal should be supported to pass naturally without euthanasia.

Dr. Kathleen Cooney, board member and chair of the Educational Committee, suggested that in some cases, waiting for a natural death may be too distressing for both the animal and the family keeping watch. For example, a client with throat cancer might eventually strangle to death without the intervention of euthanasia. In this case, she sees euthanasia as the merciful choice.

Cooney, a Loveland resident, envisions a future where every veterinarian will accompany a terminal diagnosis with guidance, education and referrals. To assuage fear and uncertainty, veterinary offices can have a hospice team in place to offer referrals and options to the family. Pain management is the number one concern of an animal hospice provider. "I want people to know that Colorado has wonderful hospice and palliative care resources for folks who receive a terminal diagnosis for a pet," said Cooney. Please see the box at right for more information on where to locate pet hospice and other resources.

IAAHPC Conference Goals

The goals for this year's conference were to:

- Define hospice care and its best practices for all providers.
- Raise public and professional awareness regarding pain management, quality of life, euthanasia, natural death, body after-care and pet loss support, following a terminal diagnosis.
- Offer relevant education, combined with networking opportunities, for providers and potential providers.

The following is a list of hospice, palliative care and end-of-life practitioners you will want to keep handy for when the time comes for your furry friend.

Lorraine May founded the Misha May Foundation Dog Training & Rescue in 2001 in memory of her dog Misha who had passed away from cancer. She has extensive experience in dealing with extreme separation anxiety issues in dogs. For more information, please visit her website www.mishamayfoundation.org.

Animal Reiki Certification Class

This class is only being offered once in 2013. Designed and taught by Lorraine May, this class will teach students how to experience the world from the animal's perspective.

Attendees will learn Reiki practices, as well as animal communication, handling strategies, physiology, psychology and more. Special attention will be paid to trauma reduction and calming protocols. The result is often the alleviation of symptoms such as pain, fear and anxiety, as well as positive changes in behavior.

Reiki does not replace other kinds of medicine but collaborates with them to create a multi-level approach impacting the physical body, the emotions and the mind.

Class Details (only one offering in 2013)

Friday 1/25/13 through Sunday 1/27/13

Doggie Delights on Broadway

1432 South Broadway in Denver

Register by 12/31/12 for a discount.

To register (required), please call 303-239-0382

or visit mishamayfoundation@gmail.com.

Colorado Resources

- Argus Institute** Providing quality-of-life assessments, end-of-life counseling, support during euthanasia, grief counseling and much more (part of CSU).
www.argusinstitute.colostate.edu/
- Bach Flower Essences** Natural flower essences that assist animals with stress, past trauma, anxiety, fear, depression and more.
www.bachflower.com
- Beside Still Water** Dr. Ann provides compassionate, unhurried, in-home euthanasia allowing for a peaceful parting. Also provides aftercare services.
www.besidestillwater.com
- Caring Pathways** Provides in-home health and quality-of-life assessments, pet hospice services and in-home euthanasia.
www.caringpathways.com
- Circle of Animals** Veterinary service using western medicine, homeopathy and chiropractic. Assists w/hospice and end-of-life decisions, provides peaceful in-home euthanasia and aftercare.
coanimals.com
- Ginger Lead** Dog support harness to assist dogs who need back-end support due to surgery, hip dysplasia, etc.
www.gingerlead.com
- Home to Heaven** Dr. Cooney offers in-home hospice and compassionate in-home euthanasia services and aftercare.
www.hometoheaven.com
- Human Animal Bond Trust** Provides free weekly pet-loss support group. Resource for grief counselors.
www.humananimalbondtrust.org
- Beezer & Boomer** Denver author Doug Koltavy's book, *The Legacy of Beezer & Boomer: Lessons Learned From My Canine Brothers*, is a must read for anyone dealing with a pet's terminal diagnosis, anticipatory grief or pet loss.
www.beezerandboomer.com
- Memory Vessels** Keepsake pendant that stores memories such as photos or videos as well as locks of fur, cremains and more.
www.memoryvessels.com
- Misha May Foundation** Providing dog-training and rescue, resources for animal communication, Reiki training (energy healing), Bach flower remedy information and more.
www.mishamayfoundation.org
- Tallgrass Animal Acupressure** Provides a list of certified acupressure practitioners, books, articles and pressure point charts so you can help your pet with pain, etc.
www.animalacupressure.com
- World by the Tail** Offering paw impression kits, books, urns, jewelry and resources for pet hospice and grief counseling.
www.veterinarywisdom.com