**Quality of Life Assessment**

This handout has been designed to help you consider the quality of life of your pet and to help make you aware of some of the additional options that exist if it is not the right time for euthanasia. Answer each of the following questions in each section with a yes or no.

**PAIN**

Pain control is essential. Many animals do not complain in obvious, visible ways when they hurt. Many animals will hide their discomfort. Consider the following:

\_\_\_My pet hurts.

\_\_\_My pet limps. (If it didn’t hurt, they wouldn’t limp.)

\_\_\_My pet pants frequently, even at rest.

\_\_\_My pet’s respirations are forced, exaggerated, or otherwise not normal.

\_\_\_My pet licks repeatedly at one site on his/her body or at a site of a cancer/tumor.

\_\_\_My pet guards or protects an area of his/her body and may snap if that area is approached or touched.

\_\_\_My animal’s posture is abnormal or different than normal.

\_\_\_My pet shakes or trembles sometimes during rest.

\_\_\_My pet is on pain medication and it doesn’t work (or work as much as it use to).

*Possible interventions for yes answers: start pain medication, change pain medications, combinations of pain medications from different drug classes, surgical intervention (if indicated), non-traditional medicine (acupuncture, etc.), treat the underlying disease/condition.*

**APPETITE**

Appetite is one of the most obvious signs of wellness. Most animals are normally vigorous eaters. Consider the following:

\_\_\_My pet doesn’t eat his/her normal food anymore.

\_\_\_My pet picks at his/her food now but never used to do this.

\_\_\_My pet walks over to his/her food and looks at it but won’t eat or walks away from the food.

\_\_\_My pet doesn’t even want good stuff (treats, human foods, snacks) anymore.

\_\_\_My pet acts nauseated (i.e. drooling or licking lips) or vomits.

\_\_\_My pet is losing weight.

*Possible interventions for yes answers: hand feeding, heating food, adding moisture by soaking food or using canned varieties, careful addition of human foods, syringe feeding, stomach tube placement, medications for appetite stimulation, medications for nausea.*

**HYDRATION**

Hydration status is equally important as appetite. Without adequate water consumption, your pet can become dehydrated. Dehydration can contribute to weakness and not feeling well. Consider the following:

\_\_\_My pet doesn’t drink as much as he/she used to.

\_\_\_My pet is vomiting or has diarrhea (fluid loss can also contribute to dehydration).

*Possible interventions for yes answers: add moisture to the diet, subcutaneous fluid administration, medications to control vomiting or diarrhea.*

**HYGIENE**

Animals that don’t feel well, especially cats, do not have the energy to maintain normal hair and skin. Consider the following:

\_\_\_My cat doesn’t groom himself/herself anymore.

\_\_\_My pet’s hair is matted, greasy, rough looking, dull or foul smelling.

\_\_\_My pet has stool pasted around his/her rectum or in his/her hair.

\_\_\_My pet smells like urine or has skin irritation from urine.

\_\_\_My pet has pressure sores/wounds that won’t heal.

*Possible interventions for yes answers: regular brushing and grooming, frequent bedding changes, adequate padding for areas where the pet spends a lot of time, appropriate wound care, treat the underlying disease/condition (e.g. osteoarthritis).*

**ACTIVITY/MOBILITY**

Changes in normal activity can be due to mobility problems, pain, illness, or aging (arthritis). Consider the following:

\_\_\_My pet cannot get up without assistance.

\_\_\_My pet had a hard time getting around and/or limps.

\_\_\_My pet lies in one place all day long.

\_\_\_My pet does not want to play ball, go for walks, or do the things he/she used to do.

\_\_\_My pet falls frequently.

\_\_\_My pet does not use the litter box appropriately.

\_\_\_My pet does not jump up on places he/she use to (couch, bed) or does not want to go up the stairs anymore.

*Possible interventions for yes answers: pain medication addition or adjustment, physical therapy.*

**HAPPINESS/MENTAL STATUS**

Another important area of consideration is the pet’s mental status and happiness. Consider the following:

\_\_\_My pet does not express joy and interest in life.

\_\_\_My pet does not respond to the people that he/she used to respond to.

\_\_\_My pet does not want to play with toys or do other things that he/she used to enjoy.

\_\_\_My pet seems dull, not alert, or depressed.

**GENERAL BEHAVIOR PATTERNS**

Changes in normal behavioral patterns are often a key indicator of how well an animal feels. Consider the following:

\_\_\_My pet is hiding or sleeping in odd places.

\_\_\_My pet doesn’t greet me when I come home. He/She used to do this all the time.

\_\_\_My pet is overly clingy and is following me around. He/She never used to do this.

\_\_\_My other pets are treating this pet differently. They are overly attentive or ignoring him/her completely.

\_\_\_My pet doesn’t care about what is going on around him/her.

\_\_\_My pet no longer seems to be housebroken.

\_\_\_My pet seems anxious (especially at night).

\_\_\_My pet has become very vocal.

**OWNER PERCEPTIONS**

Many times an owner is aware that their pet is suffering but does not want to give up on their pet. Consider the following:

\_\_\_I wouldn’t want to live if I were in a similar situation.

\_\_\_I would be painful if I were in a similar situation.

\_\_\_I have made appointments for euthanasia for this pet but cancelled or didn’t show up.

\_\_\_I am holding onto this pet for some sentimental reason (ex. The pet belonged to my now deceased family member; the pet helped me through a hard time in my life, etc.)

\_\_\_My pet is having more bad days than good days.

**Count the number of yes and no answers that you have marked.**

**\_\_\_\_\_\_ Yes**

**\_\_\_\_\_\_ No**

Unfortunately, there isn’t a simple point system or scale that will tell you exactly what to do for your pet. However, the more yes answered you have, the more likely it is that your pet has a poor quality of life. The original scale uses 50% as a cutoff and it would imply that more than 23 yes answers means your pet may have a diminished quality of life. If this is the case, you have two options:

1. You can utilize your veterinarian as a tool to help you discover and implement ways to better your pet’s quality of life, whether it be some of the possibilities listed above or in other options and ideas you veterinarian may have to help your pet.

OR

2. If you believe it may be time and want to discuss the end-of-life decisions for your pet or you have any questions regarding this, your veterinarian can help you access your pet’s quality of life and go over options with you.