



# RESEARCH USING SAVSNET DATA

## USING ELECTRONIC HEALTH RECORDS TO EXPLORE NEGOTIATIONS AROUND EUTHANASIA DECISION MAKING FOR DOGS AND CATS IN THE UK

Full paper published in the Veterinary Record (open access) available [here](#)

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### END-OF-LIFE DECISION MAKING

End-of-life decision making for animals happens daily in veterinary practice. However, access to such discussions as they happen is difficult, in view of the highly emotional circumstances of end-of-life consultations. Despite the expanding literature on euthanasia, few studies have explored the circumstances of euthanasia disagreement or delay.

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### STUDY DESIGN

Using a sample of 2000 electronic health records (EHRs) collected in 2018, the key points in euthanasia discussions involving canine and feline patients were identified. Specifically, consultations were selected if they involved a decision to delay euthanasia, including disagreement about the timing of euthanasia.

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### INTRODUCING EUTHANASIA AS AN OPTION

Either the vet or owner may be the first to suggest euthanasia for reasons such as poor quality of life or financial costs involved with continued investigation or treatment. Both vets and owners use their perception of the patient's quality of life to justify their suggestion of euthanasia or their refusal.

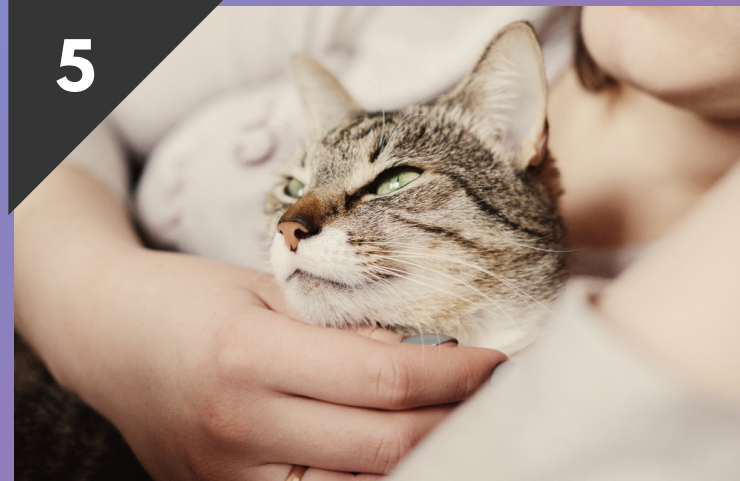
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### DELAYED EUTHANASIA

Owners often want more time with the animal, or to consult with others, before deciding on euthanasia. Some of the reasons recorded included allowing the owner to say goodbye, allowing support from a family member or allowing the family to say their goodbyes. Delayed euthanasia is mitigated by palliative care

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### PALLIATIVE CARE

Owners sometimes opted for palliative care, often pain relief, if they rejected the veterinary surgeon's offer for euthanasia or further treatment. Owners who agreed to palliative treatment were recorded as doing so to provide additional pain-free time or to allow for more time to make a euthanasia decision.

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### NEGOTIATION

From the EHRs studied, the concept of 'negotiating' the decision for euthanasia encompasses evidence of vets and owner prioritising their understanding of the best decision for the animal, and themselves, from their respective positions as a healthcare provider and caregiver.

“ Euthanasia is a sensitive subject that is often not talked about until the last minute. This study suggests that it is important that vets and owners share their concerns, hopes and expectations for end-of-life care from an early stage in the illness trajectory. Thanks must go to veterinary practices submitting data to SAVSNET. ”

Dr Carol Gray

