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28/4/2016

Dear Sir

We heartily agree with the letter from Prof and Mrs Noakes written in response to the review article “Veterinary hospice and palliative care: a comprehensive review of the literature” (Goldberg, 2016). The review highlights the need for “scholarly activity” to progress the use of hospice care for terminally ill animals. We would suggest that rather than scholarly research, a careful consideration of the ethical issues involved in this area should be given priority. However good the standard of care, it is highly unlikely that the pain or distress experienced by terminally ill animals will be eliminated. Unlike humans, we do not believe that companion animals would consider an increased period of terminal illness to be balanced by a “benefit” of continued human contact or companionship.

It is, of course, difficult to respond to the demands of owners for ever more invasive procedures on pet animals, when such interventions may well not be in the best interests of the animal itself. As Prof and Mrs Noakes point out, we have the ability to resolve animal suffering by applying euthanasia - a privilege of our profession that prompts envy in many of our medical colleagues - and their patients, and one which we believe we would be foolish to eschew.

The issues raised by hospice care should be considered together with the related ethical concerns the profession is facing when high-risk procedures form part of the treatment options for a companion animal. Our duty of care to animals, rather than to their owners, should be given priority and the question asked, “Who benefits most from hospice care – the owner or the animal - or perhaps the veterinarian?”

Yours sincerely,



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