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The 14th Annual Feline Fanciers Symposium
abdomen, destroying the haircoat. If the cat has a bare belly with no hair stubble, it may have feline endocrine alopecia and anger creeping in. Bald belly syndrome is seen more frequently in Abyssinians and Siamese and may be due to psychogenic causes in these breeds as they are quite high strung.

Facial dermatitis can often be quite unsightly as the cat scratches excessively at its head and neck, creating lesions that are ulcerated and crusted. This disorder is often the result of food allergies, however, eye, ear, mouth, or palm lesions can be caused by atopic dermatitis. As the problem develops, the skin becomes thickened and resilient. In other cases, the skin may be anogenital, or tail. This is especially true in cats with flea allergy, or atopic dermatitis. Atopy also can be caused by atopic dermatitis, or allergic contact dermatitis. Atopy is often seen in cats that are also allergic to pollens, molds, or food. Atopy is also characterized by an underlying immune response, which can be detected by skin testing or blood testing. Skin testing is the most reliable method for diagnosing atopic dermatitis.

Pet Loss: Losing a Member of the Family

In 1977 the University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine entered into a joint project with the University's Graduate School of Social Work. A careful evaluation of the needs of the hospital's patients was carried out to determine the best way to counsel clients whose pets were severely ill or dying. The idea of having someone work with and be available to upset pet owners originated at the University of Pennsylvania. Since then, the concept of pet bereavement counseling has spread to other veterinary schools and clinics.

Kathleen Dunn, M.S.W., the current full-time social worker at the Veterinary Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania (VHUP), discussed pet loss. "Pets provide unconditional love. They take on many roles in a person's life; they can be a companion, a buddy, a best friend, a child, a sister or brother. A pet is always there to love us and greet us. When a strong attachment forms between the owner and the animal, the pet becomes a person and a part of the family."

People want the longest possible life for their pets; in fact, we would love our pets to live forever. Often, when an animal is brought to VHUP, it is because it has life-threatening disease. Ms. Dunn is
available, with the veterinarian, to help the upset owner at this very stressful time. "It is very difficult for the attached pet-owner to make a decision if euthanasia is recommended because the animal's quality of life is poor," she said. "Because of attachment and bonding to the animal most owners feel very guilty. The sentence I hear over and over is: 'I feel as though I am putting a member of my family to sleep. I feel like I know the animal is suffering, but emotionally this is very difficult to do.'" It is here that the role of the veterinarian becomes very important. He or she has to understand the emotional pain the owner is suffering at this time and has to understand the pet owner's concerns. Ms. Dunn explained that owners cope in different ways with euthanasia of the pet. Some take the animal home and have their veterinarian come to the house, feeling it least stressful on the animal. Some have the animal euthanized here at VHUP - wanting the vet who took care of it to do it, and often owners want to be with their pet and hold it while the drug is injected, saying 'my pet has always been there for me. I can't leave it at a time like this,' "We try to accommodate the client and the pet as much as possible," she said, "we respect the relationship the owner has had with the pet." Ms. Dunn explained that in the owner's grieving process the disposition of the pet's body is an important issue. "There are several options: owners can take the body back to bury on their property, or they can have the animal interred in a pet cemetery, or VHUP can arrange for individual cremation where the ashes will be returned to the owner. The cremation process can be witnessed. We can also arrange for communal cremation, but then no ashes will be returned." Each pet owner feels differently, and individual wishes are an important consideration.

Ms. Dunn said that it is vital to the owner to be able to talk about the pet and the disposition of the body. "People will tell me that they want the ashes because they feel that their pet is still a part of the family, and emotionally this is decisive for them," said Ms. Dunn. She explained the phases of grieving, such as anger and guilt. "People are often angry at themselves, they feel that they may not have taken the animal to the vet early enough, for example," she said. "They may also be angry at the surviving animals. People can be very irrational for the first 24 hours after a pet's death and it is important that they express their feelings: they will calm down after the outburst." When a beloved pet dies, people go through a mourning and grieving process and are often surprised at the emotional reaction they are having - e.g. crying, sadness, and depression.

Guilt is another emotion that surfaces early in the grieving process. "People will ponder whether they were responsible for the illness or death because they forgot to give medication once or twice, or because they ignored some minor instructions from the vet," she said. "I try to tell the students that owners may call repeatedly after a pet's death asking the veterinarian questions as to whether they were indirectly responsible. This is very important and the veterinarian must be understanding." Most often the calls come from very responsive owners who are feeling guilty and need reassurance they did everything possible for their deceased pet. The stress people are experiencing can be very intense.

Grief affects people differently. Some may not be able to eat, others may oversleep; sleep may be fitful. Most people cry and are surprised at the depth of their sadness and depression. "We counsel people to resume their activities as quickly as possible and to stay busy," Above all, it is very important that people talk about their loss, either with their family and friends, or, if that is not possible, with Ms. Dunn and the Pet Loss Support Group at VHUP. "We meet twice a month and give each other the chance to talk through the grief," Ms. Dunn said. "Often grieving for a pet stirs up memories of a previous loss, mostly of beloved human relatives, and it is important to talk about it at this difficult time. " Again, people are surprised to find themselves thinking of a beloved relative who died, maybe of the same diagnosis as the pet or another serious illness. People can come to the grief support group as long as they feel the need. Quite often private vets refer specific clients, or people call who have read about the group. Ms. Dunn emphasized that it is important to work through the grief process, and that everyone goes through it. The grief process can take time. The job is not done when the pet is in the ground or the ashes are in a cemetery, or at the pet's favorite play area."

Ms. Dunn mentioned that some owners are able to overcome the grief by obtaining a new animal, while others are not able to replace the pet because they cannot face the thought of eventual loss of the animal. However, as time goes on - most of this group can't stand the silence in their house and eventually obtain another animal - they miss the companionship of a pet. "It is a very individual decision and each one has to work it through." What might be right for one owner, might not help another.

Ms. Dunn touched briefly at her role here at VHUP and mentioned that she is part of a team, though not giving veterinary advice. She is also an important resource and support for the fourth-year students who, for the first time, come face to face with clients with terminally ill animals. "We teach our students, interns, and residents about the importance of the pet - owner attachment and bonding. We teach about the grief process and what the veterinarian can do to help the client which is very important in all this. We are available for students, interns and residents when they need help in working with upset pet owners whose animals are ill or who have died."

Ms. Dunn is also available for pet owners who have lost a pet. She can be reached at (215) 898.4529.

Ultrasound Imaging of Abdominal Disorders

Ultrasound, a relatively new technology in veterinary medicine, is a valuable diagnostic tool for the examination of soft tissues and organs in the abdomen. Dr. Mark Saunders, assistant professor of radiology, gave an overview.

"Abdominal ultrasound is an additional diagnostic modality available to the veterinarian, said Dr. Saunders. "It is often used to clarify an abnormality seen on a radiograph. In addition, we can use ultrasound to biopsy or aspirate a mass as we can guide the needle to an exact location."

It is a form of non-invasive imaging. Sound waves above the frequency limits of human hearing, ranging from 2 to 10 Megahertz, are emitted from a transducer placed on the skin. These varying amounts and strength of sound waves are reflected back to the transducer from different tissue and an image is generated and displayed on a screen. The ultrasound waves emitted from the transducer into the tissue gradually lose their strength with depth and penetration. The amount of sound absorption is directly proportional to the frequency of the sound.

High frequency sound, because of higher tissue absorption, cannot penetrate as deeply into tissue. For this reason, high frequency ultrasound is used to examine superficial structures, and lower frequencies must be used for scanning deeper tissue. Ultrasound cannot penetrate bone or air.

VHUP's ultrasound equipment is quite sophisticated and provides detailed images. The ultrasonographer has available transducers emitting varying frequencies; the image can be frozen, it can be measured and calculations can be performed by the built-in computer and everything can be recorded on tape and images. Cross-sectional representations of anatomy taken in various planes. By imaging the internal architecture of organs, ultrasound differs from radiographs which depicts only the silhouette of an organ.

For an ultrasound exam the animal generally does not have to be sedated. "Animals are placed on their side on the table," explained Dr. Saunders. "The abdomen has been clipped to allow better contact with the transducer. In a supine position, a gel is rubbed on the skin. Most animals relax and some go to sleep during the exam."

"A complete ultrasound exam of the abdomen takes about 30 minutes. We don't just zero in on one organ but examine the entire abdomen. Often abnormalities are found that no one suspected." Each organ presents a specific ultrasound appearance and the radiologist is able to diagnose disorders in the organ by changes in the amount of sound reflected, depending on the disease. For example, a healthy liver has a certain echo-gencity (reflectivity), if the liver has a lot of fatty tissue, the echogenicity changes. "In a majority of cases, the ultrasonographic abnormalities seen in an organ are not specific for a certain disease," said Dr. Saunders. "But when those abnormalities are integrated with the history, physical examination findings, radiographic abnormalities and laboratory results we can be more specific about the disease process. In some cases biopsy of the organ is needed for a definitive diagnosis."

Structural abnormalities of the following abdominal organs can be evaluated by ultrasound: liver and gall bladder, spleen, pancreas, stomach, intestines, kidneys, bladder, prostate gland, uterus, testes, adrenal glands and major blood vessels. These structural abnormalities may be caused by infection, tumors, cysts or obstructive processes.

Ultrasound is also used to examine the heart. VHUP's cardiology department has a sophisticated Doppler echocardiography unit which provides color images and allows for a detailed, non-invasive examination of the organ.