

Cat Practice Develops Hospice Program for Aging Felines

Veterinary clinic to hold a four-part workshop on caring for aging cats beginning May 16.

- By [Laura Houser](#) May 4, 2012



For aging relatives, families often turn to hospice care to ensure parents and grandparents with terminal health conditions live out the rest of their lives comfortably and safely.

But what about when those growing older or developing diseases aren't humans — they're your cats?

That's where Birmingham's [Cat Practice](#) — a cat-only veterinary clinic — is stepping in, offering end-of-life care for some of our furriest, and best, feline friends.

"Helping your feline friend through a final illness is definitely worth the effort," Troy resident and cat owner Maryann Clark said. "Especially when they know that the treatments you provide are making them feel better."

The cat hospice program began with Clark in 2009 and her two cats, Rocky and Purrdy. In 2009, 16-year-old Purddy developed kidney failure and heart disease. In 2011, 17-year-old Rocky was diagnosed with heart disease.

While euthanasia is often the go-to option for pet owners with seriously ill pets, Clark wanted Rocky and Purrdy to live as long as possible assuming they were still active and could enjoy a good quality of life.

The Cat Practice opened its doors to Clark and her feline buddies, where the pair became the first patients to receive hospice and end-of-life care at the veterinary clinic. The pair's hospice care was even chronicled for friends and family on the [clinic's Facebook page](#).

Hospice program includes 'comfort care,' affection, pain medication

Both cats have since passed away and the Cat Practice hopes to offer the hospice service to all of their patients.

Cats in the hospice program — open to families whose cats face an incurable condition — will receive care at home under the direction of Cat Practice veterinary hospice nurse Laura Kramek. Families will be taught how to administer care and have a regular pipeline to Kramek for guidance and support.

Families in the hospice program will also received reduced pricing on office visits and pet pain medications. As part of the program, pets will receive "palliative," or comfort care, that includes medication for pain and discomfort, physical affection, favorite foods and extra time with family members.

"Cats are living 20 years and more," Kramek said. "Conditions once considered untreatable — kidney failure, heart disease, diabetes, thyroid disease — can all be managed today. As more pets are viewed as family members, their families are looking for options to euthanasia while their pets still enjoys good quality of life."

In addition, psychologist Dr. Camille Greenwald, who works with the Cat Practice, will be available for grief counseling.

"Emotionally speaking, losing a pet is not very different than losing anyone else we love," Greenwald said. "Therefore, having some understanding of the normal grieving process and commonly associated feelings can help people navigate their way through what is a painful, but very natural and normal life process."

Workshops on caring for aging cats begins May 16

To help pet owners prepare to care for an aging pet, the Cat Practice will hold a [four-part workshop series](#), Caring for Aging Kitties, starting May 16.

During the program, Kramek and Greenwald will speak on caring for geriatric cats, making end-of-life decisions, pet hospice care and grieving.

A donation of \$10 per workshop or \$25 for the series is recommended, with all proceeds going to the Cat Practice's Rufus Memorial Feline Fund for cats in need. To register, go to www.thecatpractice.com or call 248-540-3390.

"Pets touch people's lives and hearts in so many ways," Kramek said. "Today, saying goodbye can be a time to continue this bond. As long as a pet is comfortable and still enjoys quality of life, pet families have choices and that is what we want to give them."

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