

the CANINE CORNER

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Quite a few years ago, I supported a fundraiser for the Canterbury SPCA and my stall was located next to that of a pet cremation service. The business owner told me she had difficulty marketing her business because people don't like to think or talk about death.

Yet death is a fact of life. And with dogs having a much shorter lifespan than our own, most of us will face the passing of a loved canine companion.

As dogs in my practice start to slow down, or reach a palliative care stage, I start asking my clients about their plans for when their dog passes away. This is a subject that has to be dealt with carefully and respectfully and it helps that I tend to get to know my clients quite well since I work with them in their own homes, where they are at ease.

If euthanasia is likely, it is important to talk to your veterinarian about whether they would euthanise the animal at home or require you to bring your pet to the clinic. Most veterinarians offer a home euthanasia service for their regular clients — yet another reason to develop a relationship with a single vet practice during the dog's lifetime.

Those pet parents who are not loyal or regular customers of a veterinary clinic may find themselves without the in-home support of a veterinarian when it is most needed. If there is a preferred veterinarian on the staff of your clinic, it's also useful to confirm their availability for a home visit. For example, do they only work certain days of the week or do they have a period of planned leave in the near future?

Equally important: what will happen to the dog's remains?

One of my very first clients dating back to 2009 told me a lovely story about how she saw her husband walking slowly with their dog in the yard that weekend. He was talking to him the entire time. When she asked her husband what he had been doing, he replied, "I was asking Hobson about where he wants to be buried." They asked me to check on Council



requirements for burying a dog's remains.

This is largely an unregulated activity in most districts. Most will recommend that the dog be buried no closer than 50m from a waterway and also that the grave is sufficiently deep to avoid interference by rodents and other animals. It is always emphasised that the body is buried without wrapping or, if wrapping is required, something biodegradable such as a jute bag or cotton blanket. No plastics such as tarps or bags.

Another of my clients heartbreakingly recounted that her family was red-zoned after the Christchurch earthquake. She regretted burying the family's pets because, now, no-one would know that they were there and in future years the land may be used again. It worried her that her pets would be disinterred by future developments.

Since many pet parents don't own their own homes, or almost certainly intend to sell and move on, burial is a less popular option than it once was. Cremation is most commonly selected by clients in my practice; it's worth knowing what services are available in your area and what transport services are offered to help get the body of your dog there when the time comes.

When my own dogs have passed, I've chosen cremation. I have always found it comforting to have their urns back home with me as I have grieved over their loss. I have also made plans in my will for what happens after I die and the disposal of the urns of my dogs. When I am cremated, the urns of my dogs will be cremated with me.

I know this is a sensitive subject for many; but as I said, death is a fact of life. Having plans in place means there is less stress when a dog becomes unwell or clearly an end-of-life decision has to be made. 🐾

My Forever Friend

*I know that it must be different, now that I am no longer there.
I realise how much I was loved, and how all of you did care.
I know it will be hard at first when you look around for me.
Expecting to find me in my bed or beside my favourite tree.*

*Someday you will begin to see although it'll take some time,
the happy times you shared with me, the memories are yours and mine.
I'll remember you, my friends, and how much you meant to me.
So please don't grieve and don't be sad, it was just my time to leave.*

