Impacts of the process and decision making around companion animal euthanasia on veterinary wellbeing

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**Introduction**
Companion animal euthanasia is one of the most important and impactful responsibilities of veterinary professionals. Previous research has shown that veterinary professionals who engage in euthanasia-related work can and do experience a reduced sense of wellbeing, increased stress, emotional strain and a decrease in job satisfaction. However, few studies have considered the impact of euthanasia-related care other than the effects of performing the act of euthanasia itself.

This study aimed to bridge the knowledge gap by exploring how the practices of euthanasia-related care and the processes leading up to euthanasia impact on the wellbeing of veterinary professionals.

**Approach**
This exploratory qualitative study consisted of nine focus group discussions and one individual interview with a total of 38 veterinary professionals – veterinarians, veterinary technicians and veterinary receptionists – from 10 companion animal veterinary hospitals in Wellington County, Ontario. A semi-structured approach was used in the discussions to explore what aspects of euthanasia-related care the participants felt had the most impact on their sense of wellbeing. Verbatim transcripts of the discussions were then thematically analysed.

**Results**
The two major themes identified were that the goal of veterinary professionals was to facilitate a ‘good death’ for the companion animal (ie, humane, peaceful, smooth and quick), and that navigating the euthanasia decision process was more challenging than actually performing euthanasia.

When successful in achieving a ‘good death’, participants reported experiencing an improved sense of wellbeing. When unsuccessful, participants reported experiencing a reduced sense of wellbeing, reduced job satisfaction, increased emotional strain and feeling that the client was also detrimentally impacted.

Moreover, for many participants, navigating euthanasia decision-making consultations was seen as a greater challenge and a greater contributor to a reduced sense of wellbeing than the act of euthanasia itself.

**Interpretation**
These findings reveal that, while the act of euthanasia has an important impact on veterinary professionals’ sense of wellbeing, veterinary professionals feel that they experience the greatest emotional strain when navigating the euthanasia decision-making process.

As the participants were all from Wellington Country, Ontario, caution should be used when applying the findings more widely, particularly to those veterinary professionals from different countries or cultural backgrounds, where perceptions and practices around companion animal euthanasia may vary.

**Significance of findings**
The findings of this study indicate that there is a need for greater attention and support for veterinary professionals, particularly when navigating euthanasia decision-making consultations. Additional training and resources on navigating euthanasia consultations may assist in improving the wellbeing of veterinary professionals and the companion animals and clients under their care.