

The Digni Framework

A case example: Bella, a terrier cross with chronic pancreatitis and mobility issues

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Define the context

Bella has chronic pancreatitis and mobility issues. She becomes highly distressed by clinic visits and her carer has decided against further diagnostics. Financial constraints and a limited support network are also influencing decision-making. The carer is not against euthanasia as a treatment option, but feels it is too soon. Bella still loves her short walks, her ball, eats well, and still does her "happy dog shake".

Define: What is unique about Bella, about her carer and their situation?

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Identify priorities

Bella is experiencing fluctuating pain that is affecting her quality of life. Her carer wishes to avoid interventions that may cause additional stress. The veterinary team is focused on maintaining welfare and preventing suffering while protecting the bond between Bella and her carer. The carer is hoping to preserve quality time together for as long as possible. These priorities overlap in many areas, but don't always align.

Identify: What matters most right now for Bella, for her carer, and for us as a team?

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Guide decision-making

Several options are discussed, including adjusting medication, additional supportive care, developing a crisis plan and discussing euthanasia as a future option. Each option involves balancing welfare, QOL, treatment burden and the pet carer's goals of care. Through discussion we explore these options and plan the approach that best aligns with Bella's needs and the pet carer's priorities.

Guide: What is the most appropriate path forward considering all the information we have?

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Navigate the journey

Bella's condition is likely to fluctuate over time. Ongoing support, QOL tracking and regular reviews of the care plan will help make sure decisions stay aligned with Bella's needs and the carer's priorities. Crisis planning and emergency support makes the carer feel prepared for changes in Bella's condition. Regular contact with the hospice nurse helps identifying changes. Anticipatory grief, euthanasia and aftercare are discussed.

Navigate: What support is needed for the next step of the journey?

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Integrate support

Additional support and a multidisciplinary team approach reduces caregiver burden and helps improve Bella's wellbeing. This includes QOL tracking app and regular consults with a hospice nurse, bereavement counselling for anticipatory grief, pet sitting assistance to relieve caregiver burden, at home euthanasia service and aftercare providers. The support team reflects Bella's needs and the carer's goals of care.

Integrate: Who else could help support Bella and her carer?

Disclaimer and acknowledgement

The Digni Framework was developed by Dignipets to make contextualised end-of-life care more operational, and informed by established principles of veterinary hospice and palliative care, including the work of Dr Amir Shanan, Dr Tamara Shearer, the IAAHPC, and others who have shaped the profession.

It has been further refined through Dignipets' experience supporting more than 22,000 pet carers over the past decade. The framework brings these influences together into a practical approach to contextualised decision-making, collaborative care planning and multidisciplinary support throughout the end-of-life journey.

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