

Ask Headquarters

Being Present as an ITA Team When Someone Passes from This Life

Several of our teams have been asked to be there when a patient or client is about to die. Our dogs are experts at this; they know exactly what to do. But for us humans it is understandably somewhat intimidating. It's not uncommon for a handler to feel that they are too conspicuous; that they don't belong or "shouldn't be there," since they are not acquainted with, let alone close to, the persons involved.

After it came up at a recent ITA board meeting, I asked our board member Jane Peterson if she would address this very important topic for our members. What follows is her response. (-KK)

Kathy asked me to write about this specific topic when one of our teams was asked to be part of an end-of-life experience. To me, this is the deepest compliment—to be asked to witness another's transition.

This came up in one of our board meetings when a handler/board representative shared her recent experience and the feelings it brought up for her. Though unsure about what was appropriate, she told us about being there and simply being present. Her instincts were excellent, because that is really the only way to go through this, whether with someone you love or even with someone you don't know at all.

Kathy's request came during a time when I myself have repeatedly been on the other side of the experience—losing a sister, a mother, a father-in-law and a mother-in-law one after another in a short time. All of them required some form of hospice care, and in three of the four, I was there and present for their passing. None are alike, and not one was easy. Our own hospice helpers were the consummate givers of support. They simply witnessed and remained present as each of us in the room grieved, cried and said goodbye to our loved one. In contemplating back on each experience, it would have been nice to have a dog in the room, as it

would have added another being who simply understands, and who can simply be present as we experience a gamut of emotions.

Speaking from that side of the loss, it was clear that our hospice friends knew intrinsically that they were just that—a witness and a support as needed, and they kept the boundary of this role. Each one knew that they had little history or background or relationship with those in the room, or with the one who was transitioning—only to come in at this late phase in life and provide validation for feelings, empathy for the experience and support as asked. No one explained anything about how to feel, or how it was going to feel, or how it should feel. They listened, observed, gave an appropriate pat on the shoulder or a hug as asked. They viewed their work as important and knew the value it brought without having to use a lot of words. They were simply present—helping us through.

On the other side of the experience, as a professional, a greater part of my work is helping people process all sorts of grief and loss experiences. I am a therapist and have practiced for 35 years. Grief is unique to each individual. It can be very complicated and messy. It can also

(Continued next page)



be the next step in a long life well lived, but still sad and contemplative as we review the life of the loved one who is passing and our relationship with them. There is no way to grieve “easily.” And over time we begin to understand what the relationship meant and what grief teaches us. It is a journey and a changing landscape.

But if, in the course of our volunteering with ITA, we are asked to sit with and be witness to someone’s end-of-life experience, what should we do?

Of course, in our ITA role we would be with our partner, and we can start by trusting our dog to observe and support, as well. As Kathy mentioned in her email asking me to write this essay, she wrote that “our dogs usually have an automatic sense and insight into the experience that exceeds the humans.” We have all seen their wisdom in their ITA experiences.

Our job as a handler would be this: to observe, to listen, to be “with” and give support by your presence. Take the cues and lead of those around you on whether to move in closer to the loved one, or to sit back on the periphery.

It will always be important for you to talk about the experience afterward with someone you know will be able to offer you support and understand the honor that has been asked of you and your dog to be a part of this life transition.

I ran across an article by Kelly Corrigan that offers four key points (and seven words) for how one can be of help to someone who is going through emotional pain, and they also work in a situation such as end-of-life. That article is also included in this *Hydrant* on page 12.

It is important to reach out to ITA if you have a need to process events that occur during your visits. Kathy and company will help to answer your questions, hear and respond to your concerns and guide the next steps as needed.

It is and has always been an honor to work with this organization. Our animals bring more joy and happiness to others than words can describe. As we begin a new year, please remember the beautiful gift you bring to others all year-round.

– Jane Peterson

**"My favorite
animals are dogs."**

– Dr. Jane Goodall



Four Suggestions and 7 Words

To help someone going through a crisis, consider these 4 suggestions and use these 7 words if you want to truly be of help. They are from author and TV host Kelly Corrigan, who has a radical way to support a loved one through a crisis, big or small. Here are her techniques to make someone feel like it's safe to open up.

When writer Kelly Corrigan's daughters became tweens, Corrigan stood ready to help them with the troubles and travails of that delicate time. If one of her girls would come home from school angry and upset, she'd come up with ideas for how to deal with bullying, rejection, or whatever the problem was.

It didn't always go over well: "Their emotion would change, and they would go from something raw to something kind of tired and dismissive and then they would wander away," Corrigan, host of the PBS interview series *Tell Me More*, recounted on NPR's *TED Radio Hour*.

One day her daughter Georgia called, crying. Corrigan happened to be in a car with a friend who was training to become a therapist, so she put the phone on speaker.

Georgia said she hated sixth grade. All the girls in class were turning on her for no reason.

Corrigan's friend whispered: "Say 'tell me more.'" Corrigan echoed it to her daughter: "Tell me more."

Georgia went on complaining.

"Say 'that sounds really hard,'" whispered the therapist-in-training. "That sounds so hard," Corrigan said to Georgia.

"It is!" Georgia replied. And instead of shutting down like usual, the sixth-grader continued to open up to her mom. Corrigan says this differ-

ent way of communicating, though simple, was shockingly effective.

When a family member or friend is struggling emotionally, using phrases like these can unlock a deeper connection, and it's far more powerful than giving advice, says Corrigan.

Corrigan has spent years talking about families — her own and many others — on her PBS show, her podcast and in her four bestselling books. She gave a TED Talk about having the courage to respond with humility when a loved one is in crisis, which requires putting aside our own ideas about how to fix their problems.

Here are some of the lessons she offered on a recent episode of *TED Radio Hour*.

1. Hold off on offering a solution

Corrigan says it can be "kind of humiliating" if someone brings their problem to you and you just solve it right away. "Because, basically, the underlying message of that is what are you so upset about? Like, it's not that hard to figure this out," says Corrigan.

Now when a loved one is struggling, she pictures them picking through a jewelry box full of tangled up necklaces, bracelets and earrings. "And there is a tremendous satisfaction in separating all those items once and for all," she says. Corrigan says the person who's struggling should get to feel that satisfaction of solving their problem, not you as the helper.

"You have to decide their needs are paramount," she says.

(Continued on page 13)



2. Use these seven words instead

To be the most helpful to the people in your life who are trying to open up to you, you just need to say a few phrases, says Corrigan:

- “Tell me more.”
- “Go on ...”
- “What else?”

These words give them space to tell their story, to feel loved and accepted no matter how heavy the things are that they want to share. “You can get pretty far in life just with those seven words,” Corrigan says.

3. Practice emotional hospitality

Love is not one size fits all, Corrigan says. For example, if you’re caring for children, remember that not all kids like to be hugged (or adults for that matter). “If I were to custom design a feeling for you, what would the shape of it be? What would the sound of it be?” Corrigan asks.

But don’t pressure yourself to say just the right thing when someone is unburdening their pain, she says. Instead, practice “emotional hospitality,” where you create a comforting environment with your presence, inviting the other person to open up: “Tell me something. I’m here.”

And then, she says, really listen. “So few people love to listen,” Corrigan notes. “Most people, it seems, love to talk.”

4. Tune in — love can be quiet and still

Corrigan says when the going gets tough for a loved one, she gets a strong urge to jump into action mode. “Everything in me wants to grab a clipboard, make a to-do list and start calendaring appointments,” she says.

One day when her father was days from the end of his life, Corrigan noticed he seemed agitated. Fighting the desire to call a nurse or tell him to go to sleep, she just sat down and tried to tune in to his mood. And he started opening up about his life’s regrets, small things that were still weighing on him. He didn’t visit his brother-in-law enough when he was sick, for instance. He should have named a kid after his lacrosse coach who helped him avoid getting kicked out of college.

Instead of reassuring him or minimizing his misgivings, she listened.

The idea, she says, is to telegraph to them that “I’m going to absorb this thing with you. I’m going to mirror your seriousness about it. And maybe that can let you rest.” And it worked. “He leaned back on his pillow and said, I’m good, Lovey. That’s good for today,” Corrigan remembers.

This was a gift to her, she says. It gave her a chance to love him fully, just as he needed to be at that moment.

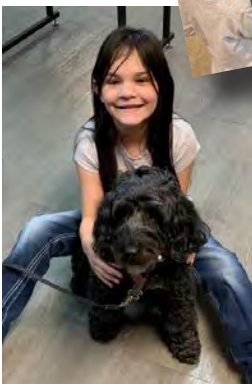
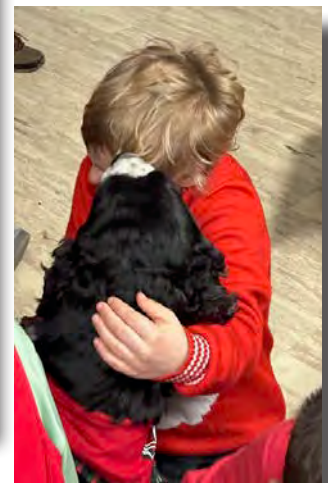
“Personally, I thought love meant action. I had no idea it could be so still.”



MORE OUT & ABOUT!



The "Santa Express" event the SLC Airport is always fun for our teams. Among those participating this year were: **FROM LEFT:** Jean Robinson & Edith, Patti Keith & Bella, and Steve Moore & Argo.



Our Helena chapter has FOUR schools, no less, that are eager to start R.E.A.D. programs in January, and 7 teams that are going to participate. They will be focusing on those children with the most emotional and behavioral needs. Here are a few photos from the Meet & Greet events that were held at the four schools recently. **CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:** Kelby, partner of Susan Ayres, eliciting a smile; teams greeting students on their tour of the school; Tess (in the Santa suit), partner of Wendy Sesselman and Rosanna Finley & Lokie; Dodge, partner of Pam Harris; and Tess & Wendy again.



HEALTH & SAFETY

The Use of Nutraceuticals for Our Animals

by Katie Domann, DVM

If you are unfamiliar with the term “nutraceuticals,” just think “dietary supplements.” They are anything you may put into your body for nutritional or medicinal purposes that is *not* a pharmaceutical; not a prescribed medication.

Key Take-Away Points:

- ✓ Nutraceuticals can be a useful adjunct to traditional medical treatments as part of a “multi-modal” approach.
- ✓ Veterinary team members are a valuable resource for providing viable recommendations of nutraceuticals.
- ✓ Nutraceuticals are not regulated by the FDA in the same way that pharmaceutical drugs are regulated. Therefore, pet owners should utilize the resources provided by their veterinary clinic’s team in selecting safe and effective products. Only FDA-approved pharmaceutical drugs can claim to treat, cure or prevent disease.

For this article, the term “nutraceuticals” will encompass all non-pharmaceutical products that are available for use in animals, and the terms “nutraceutical” and “dietary supplement” may be used interchangeably.

It is important to recognize that nutraceuticals are not the same as a prescription or even an over-the-counter medication. There are numerous types of nutraceuticals available and, based on scientific studies, many body systems may be supported by nutraceuticals. In dogs and cats, the most popular supplements include joint and digestive health supplements, followed by supplements to aid with cognition, skin/coat and heart health. In cats, hairball control supplements remain high in demand, followed by cat-specific supplements for urinary tract infections and kidney disease.

Commonly used nutraceuticals include:

- Omega-3 fatty acids: immune system support/skin and haircoat
- Glucosamine and chondroitin: (building blocks for cartilage) used in the treatment of arthritis

- Anti-oxidants
- Probiotics: ‘gut biome’
- Turmeric: active ingredient ‘curcumin’
- Chamomile
- Milk thistle: liver cell support/protection
- Cranberry extract: urinary tract health

Most pet owners are aware of the many nutraceuticals that are available for their animals. However, it can be difficult to navigate all of the resources available as to which are most beneficial for various conditions, not to mention their safety. Confusing the matter even further, there is no official process for checking the efficacy, safety or labeling of these products, as they are not classified as drugs. As a result of inadequate or “murky” regulations in the pet supplement industry, many products do not contain the active ingredients in amounts that are stated on the label, or they may have contaminants (or impurities) included at unsafe levels.

It is estimated that between 10 and 33% of dogs and cats in the United States are fed a dietary supplement. However, despite this widespread use and economic impact, nutraceuticals for companion animals (in contrast to food animals for human consumption) do not fall under the Dietary Supplement Health and Education Act (DSHEA) of 1994 and therefore undergo less regulatory oversight than human dietary supplements. The FDA regulates the safety of dietary supplements in humans, but it does not do this for animals.

Of concern, of course, is the quality, safety and efficacy of the nutraceuticals and supplements that we give to our pets. Nutraceuticals and dietary supplements differ from pharmaceutical drugs in terms of regulation and oversight. Pharmaceutical drugs require research and

(Continued on page 16)



Nutraceuticals (continued from page 15)

testing in the species on which the drug is to be used. The final product must be analyzed for purity, and contaminants, and label claims must be factual. Veterinary supplements and nutraceuticals are not drugs, therefore these steps are not required to be done before the product is purchased by pet owners. Many pet owners are very surprised to learn that there are no legal requirements for veterinary supplement and nutraceutical manufacturers to produce their product.

While there is a mechanism in place to regulate pet supplements if there is an adverse event, there is no system to ensure that a manufacturer is accountable for the labeling of ingredients in pet supplements and nutraceuticals.

Fortunately, there are several avenues available for supplement and nutraceutical manufacturers to use to help ensure trust in their product. A good way to determine the quality of a nutraceutical is to check whether a manufacturer has Good Manufacturing Practice Certification. These certifications are granted by authorized third parties to manufacturing facilities that are compliant with the FDA current Good Manufacturing Practice regulations. Certification lasts for 3 years and involves an analysis of computer systems, analysis of manufacturing facilities, and review of personnel. It ensures that products are manufactured consistently to minimize errors and contamination. Veterinary team members can contact supplement and nutraceutical manufacturers to determine whether they are GMP-certified.

Consumer Laboratory is an independent, for profit laboratory that offers a seal of validation for pet supplements sold in the USA that are appropriately labeled. It purchases its products independently from pet retailers rather than accepting product samples from manufacturers. Some of the things for which it tests include:

- Identity: Does the product meet recognized standards of identity and does the product meet the level of quality claimed on the label?
- Strength (quantity): Does the product contain the

amount of ingredient claimed on the label?

- Purity: Is the product free of specified contaminants?
- Disintegration: Does the product break apart properly so that it may be used by the body?

The public can access selected information from the consumerlab.com website (for a fee of around \$60/year) for ingredients and products that have been tested. Criteria for passing and failing and reasons for failure for specific ingredients can be accessed, as can a list of proprietary products that have passed. Consumerlab.com will provide its top picks based on their independent product testing and validation. Your veterinary clinic may already be a member, so be sure to ask!

Finally, there is the National Animal Supplement Council (NASC) which was formed in 2001 as a nonprofit industry group that aims to place safety standards on supplements for companion animals and horses and on manufacturers to promote the use of safe ingredients in their products. NASC provides pet parents with the utmost confidence in reliable, high-quality health supplements. They ensure that consumers don't have to worry about where the product was made, whether the ingredients are safe, and if the product's manufacturing process was safe. Companies that supply animal health supplements, manufacture supplements, etc. can apply for membership. Members must pass a comprehensive quality audit every 2 years, maintain ongoing compliance, participate in annual continuing education facilitated by NASC, and pass random independent testing of their products to ensure they are meeting label claims. Members can then display the NASC Quality Seal on their packaging. The NASC does not require companies to perform efficacy studies on their products or verify that scientific research data are available proving product efficacy. Additionally, there is no incentive for companies to have their products tested without any mandated oversight. NASC cannot mandate formulation changes unless an ingredient is purported to do harm.

It's very tempting to look online for information about nutraceuticals and supplements. It's important to bear in mind that anyone can publish anything on the inter-

(Continued on page 17)



Nutraceuticals (continued from page 16)

net whether it's true or not. However, you can "train" yourself to recognize the false from the true. Scientific references come from scientific, peer-reviewed journals such as the Annals of Internal Medicine, The Journal of the American Veterinary Association, The Cochrane Database, the Journal of the American Emergency and Critical Care Society, Journal of Nutrition, etc. Scientific References *do not* come from newspapers, Time magazine, the Whole Dog Journal, or Cat Fancy. What you want to find are peer-reviewed journal articles (meaning the article has been reviewed by experts in the same field). If the ingredients and their amounts are not detailed, avoid purchasing from that company. "Proprietary ingredients" are secret, and there is no way to tell whether they may be either toxic or merely useless to your pet. If a company sells veterinary supplements, it should be a member of the National Animal Supplement Council industry group that ensures high standards of quality control and maintains an adverse-event reporting system. If the company does not belong, it indicates a willingness to cut corners.

References:

today's veterinary nurse.com, Fall 2024

"Integrating Veterinary Supplements and Nutraceuticals into Traditional Approaches"

Written by: Adrienne A. Kruzer, BBA, RVT, LVT

Nutrition Today (2020 Mar-Apr;55(2):97-101)

"Veterinary Pet Supplements and Nutraceuticals"

Written by: Carrie Finno

Paintings with Dogs



ITA member **Ricardo Fernandez**, in our Helena chapter, sent us this beautiful portrait that his wife **Gina** painted of their neighbor's dog, **Brady**. Thank you, Fernandezes!

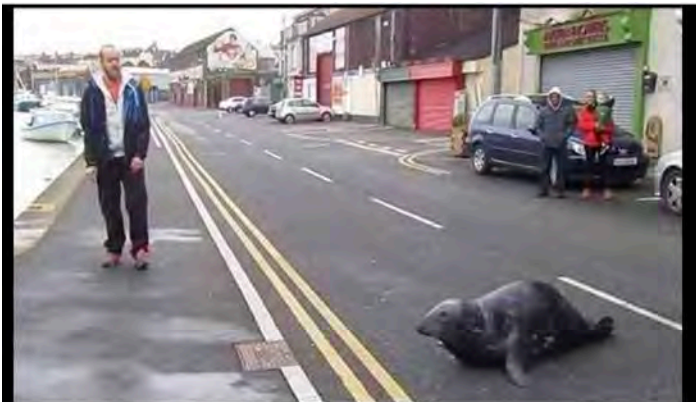
Do you have any paintings of your own companions that you have done yourself, or had done, that you'd like to share with your ITA colleagues?

PLEASE SHOW US!

Send to kathy@therapyanimals.org.



The Lighter Side



Sammy the seal was always begging for food at an Ireland restaurant, so the staff started feeding him daily at 9am, 1pm, and 4pm. Now he flops out of the water, looks both ways, crosses the road, and awaits his prize at those exact times every day. He is never late.

