

As our pets age, and especially if they are experiencing chronic health conditions or serious illness, they need additional support to live the best lives that they can. By implementing a specialized approach to medical care, we can focus on supporting good health and quality of life. In doing so, we can help our pets live well, whether they have a lot more time, or just a short period of time remaining. For many pets, care in the home is especially helpful because it requires no stressful travel or time away from their family. *At Chicago Veterinary Geriatrics, our most important goal is to help improve the quality of life of our patients while supporting their bond with their human families.*

**Palliative Medicine** refers to the medical aspects of the broader terms **Palliative Care** and **Hospice Care**. Palliative Medicine is a philosophy of healthcare where emotional and physical comfort are prioritized, and where health conditions are managed long-term, either while seeking a cure or because there is no cure. For example, every patient undergoing chemotherapy and/or radiation therapy will benefit from implementing a **Palliative Medicine** program during therapy. **Palliative Care** can be implemented at any age or point in a pet's life, while **Hospice Care** generally describes this type of care nearer the end of life.

❖ **Levels of Care:** To help in defining and understanding the services of Chicago Veterinary Geriatrics, Dr. Cook has defined the following four "Levels of Care". Your pet's "Level of Care" will determine the appointment and communication schedule that is needed to continue care as an active patient.

- **Longevity Support** is for pets who are relatively healthy, who may or may not be in senior/geriatric life stages, and for whom we want to monitor health more carefully. They do not have debilitating chronic pain conditions or any serious/life-limiting illnesses. For these patients, we have the ability to use a variety of supportive therapies, as well as advanced physical examination skills and diagnostic testing to monitor their health. *These pets generally will need to have appointments at least every 3-6 months.*
- **Palliative Care** is for pets who may or may not be in senior/geriatric life stages, but who are experiencing chronic health conditions (such as chronic pain due to arthritis) and/or are in the early stages of a serious illness. For these pets, there are generally one or more symptoms or issues that are starting to compromise their good quality of life, such as pain, nausea, anxiety, etc. Some common examples of conditions where Palliative Care can be beneficial are management of arthritic/spinal pain, mobility issues, degenerative neurological conditions, respiratory conditions, support of early systemic

## Appointments for Initial Consultation & OnGoing Care

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organ failure (e.g. heart, liver, kidney), immune mediated conditions, Cognitive Dysfunction Syndrome (CDS, dementia), and support in early stages of cancer (and while undergoing chemotherapy/radiation). *These pets generally will need to have appointments at least every 1-3 months.*

- **Hospice Care (Early Hospice Care & Advanced Hospice Care)** is for pets who again may or may not be older, but who are experiencing unstable health conditions and are often in later stages of a serious illness (including terminal conditions). Unfortunately, sometimes serious illness is either very acute or progresses rapidly, so some pets will need to begin their Palliative Medicine journey in Hospice Care. All of the conditions listed above are common in Hospice Care patients, but just in later stages. In veterinary medicine, End of Life Care is the final stage of Hospice Care and may or may not involve euthanasia services. *These pets generally will need to have appointments daily to every 4 weeks.*

### ❖ What happens during an Initial Consultation Appointment?

- We will work together to develop a personalized plan for your pet's care. We will consider findings from our physical exam and assessment, review of previous medical history, and discussion of your goals, hopes, and worries for your pet's care moving forward.
- Initial Consultations are generally about 1.5-2 hours long so that we can review progress since your pet's TeleHealth Consultation, discuss your pet's medical history and current concerns, and to start to work through an initial recommended care plan. Extended appointments may be available if desired but do carry additional fees. *Please schedule at a time when you have at least two hours available.*
- Examples of comfort measures may include multimodal pain management, mobility enhancement techniques and devices, alternate medication and treatment choices, nutrition & hydration therapy, anti-nausea therapy, respiratory/breathing therapies, and anti-anxiety/calming therapies.
- Dr. Cook is also trained and experienced in TCVM (Traditional Chinese Veterinary Medicine) with study at the Chi University of TCVM and so able to offer services for acupuncture, Chinese herbal therapy, and Chinese food therapy. *A complimentary trial acupuncture treatment is included in the Initial Consultation appointment if desired, time permitting.*
- Another important part of the Initial Consultation is to start developing a plan for urgent/emergency care (in case needed) including an introduction to the concept of a Comfort Care Kit, and potentially to discuss considerations for End of Life Care (which may or may not include in-home euthanasia).

### ❖ How does On-Going Care work?

- After your pet's Initial Consultation, Dr. Cook will determine what Level of Care (appointment and communication schedule) is needed for your pet to help monitor and support their care moving forward. *Your pet's Level of Care will be adjusted over time based on their individual care needs.*
- All new patients are required to schedule a follow-up appointment for an On-Going Care Consultation within 14 days of the Initial Consultation to establish care as an active patient.
- On-Going Care Consultations are generally ~45 minutes long. These appointments are follow-up appointments for exam, consultation, and medication adjustments.
- Brief Consultations are generally ~30 minutes long. These appointments are for minor check-ups.
- Treatment/Service Visits are generally ~15 minutes long (~30 minutes in the case of physical therapies). These appointments are used for lab specimen collection, treatment administration, and physical therapies such as acupuncture and laser therapy.
- In some cases, extended appointments may be needed (additional charges apply).

### ❖ Availability for Appointments & Communications:

- Our availability is based on the appointments/commitments already scheduled, but we do our very best to be available when needed.
- Initial Consultation appointments are generally scheduled on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays, at ~10:00/11:00 AM and ~12:00/1:00 PM.
- On-Going Care appointments are scheduled on weekdays with the first appointment at ~10:00/11:00 AM and last appointment of the day at ~3:00/4:00 PM.
- Urgent, Emergency, and After-Hours Appointments & Communications:
  - We always want to do everything we can to avoid emergency situations as they are stressful for you and your pet. We will always do our best to help, but we are not an emergency clinic.
  - During clinic hours, if we do not have an appointment time available, we will try to work with you to find a time to fit in an appointment on an emergency basis (additional charges apply).
  - Evening and weekend appointments are provided when possible (additional charges apply).
  - After-Hours Emergency appointments are reserved for current palliative/hospice care patients but may be available for new patients in some cases (additional charges apply).

## ❖ Preparing for your pet's Initial Consultation Appointment:

- The first step is to complete the attached New Patient Form and Questionnaire. This form has been designed carefully by Dr. Cook over a number of years to help in planning for your pet's appointment and care. *Please also save a copy of this form for yourself and as a back-up.*
  - **Please complete and return this form to us as soon as possible after requesting an appointment, especially if your pet's care needs are urgent.**
- If you have Microsoft Word, you can complete the form digitally by typing in the grey box fields and using the grey checkboxes. *If you do not have Microsoft Word, please print the PDF version of the form, complete it, and then either email or fax back to us.*
- Please list **ALL** hospitals that have cared for your pet on the New Patient Form (including your primary care veterinarian, specialists, and emergency hospitals) so that we will know who to contact for your pet's medical records (and where to send reports from our appointments).
  - Dr. Cook will need to review at least 1-2 years of your pet's medical records (more if pertinent to your pet's current health conditions).
  - *If medical records are not received at least 3-5 days prior to our appointment, there may be inadequate time for review before your pet's appointment.*

## ❖ General Considerations and FAQ's:

- **Infectious disease (including COVID-19) safety policies must be followed at all times.**
- All appointments are mobile, meaning we come to your home. *We do not have a clinic location.*
- Dr. Cook must be able to park in close proximity to your home as he is often carrying a number of bags and materials. *Please ensure that parking is available. You are responsible for all parking and toll fees.*
- In most cases, we do not bring a nurse to appointments, but his service can be scheduled in advance if needed, such as to assist in diagnostic specimen collection (additional fees apply).
- Communications between appointments are generally complimentary as long as recommended appointment schedule is followed, and communications are not overly complex or emergent. *There are additional charges for emergency and after-hours communications.*
- Payment is respectfully required at the time of service. *Preferred payment methods are cash, Venmo (@ChicagoVeterinaryGeriatrics), and Zelle/Quickpay (info@chicagoveterinarygeriatrics.com). We are also able to accept major credit cards (processing fees apply).*