

## Support Your Local Euthanasia Technician

Study gathers stress-reduction ideas from those in the most difficult jobs

BY CARRIE ALLAN

Is there a staffer at your shelter who performs euthanasia? If so, when's the last time you smiled at her, asked how she's doing, or listened to her when she needed to vent?

Seem like small things? They're not—especially if you're a manager.

In a recent study of stress-reduction suggestions compiled from responses of shelter workers around the country who perform or assist with euthanasia, support and encouragement from colleagues and management ranked number one on the list of things respondents say would help them cope with the stress inherent to their work.

Published in the *Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science* (Vol. 10, No. 4), "What Shelters Can Do About Euthanasia-Related Stress: An Examination of Recommendations From Those on the Front Line" examines the responses of more than 300 employees from 62 shelters around the country. Researchers Steven Rogelberg, Ph.D., Natalie DiGiacomo, M.S., Charlie Reeve, Ph.D., and others identified trends that may aid shelter managers looking for ways to help their staff.

Seventy-four percent of the respondents were female, and most were 25 to 34 years old. Most were certified euthanasia technicians. Close to half had at least a high school education; another 42 percent had attended college as well.

The survey queried respondents about their work environments, attitudes, and experiences with euthanasia. It also solicited free-form recommendations: "Please tell us what you think shelter management should or could do to assist shelter workers in dealing with euthanasia-related stress." Eighty percent of respondents completed the section, and researchers sorted the 359 suggestions into 26 thematic categories.



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The most common answers fell into the following categories: Be supportive and encourage support from others (mentioned by 13 percent of respondents); provide counseling and professional help (12 percent of respondents); allow for rotation of euthanasia staff (11 percent); hire or provide more staff to do euthanasia (10 percent); allow for breaks and time off (9 percent). Other categories included arranging support groups, communicating more effectively, and providing more skills-based training.

"The most popular ... suggestions had to do with promoting understanding and support between euthanasia technicians and noneuthanasia employees who work side-by-side," the authors wrote, noting that the responses indicated that a good number of

euthanasia technicians believe their coworkers' criticism makes their jobs more difficult.

The authors also identified animal shelters as culturally unique. "Promoting a culture of support within any organization is a valuable goal in general; within animal sheltering organizations, it may be an imperative," they wrote. "After all, it is often the case that those charged with euthanasia responsibilities experience a dearth of support from the public and even family and friends."

Nobody wants to euthanize animals; it takes a strong mind and skilled, gentle hands to do the job. Euthanasia technicians know that already. But a little acknowledgment from colleagues and supervisors can help them remember it—and go a long way toward easing their burden. **AS**