

Comments on the dilemma in the October issue: 'Euthanasia in a no-kill shelter'

The dilemma in the October issue concerned a local shelter's changing policy on euthanasia. It had previously promoted itself as a no-kill organisation, a policy for which it received significant public support and funding. However, its board of trustees had recently begun pressing for healthy animals to be put down because of a lack of capacity (*In Practice*, October 2014, vol 36, pp 478-479). Vanessa Ashall advised that, while it wouldn't be unethical for the board to formally review the shelter's stance on euthanasia, it would be unacceptable for the institution to surreptitiously shift its practices, as this would end up deceiving the public. She suggested that the vet involved should ask the trustees to clarify the principles underpinning the non-destruction policy and how those relate to the shelter's new circumstances.

THIS dilemma was very interesting. In particular, because it reminds us of the definition of the word euthanasia and of the fact that we should be careful how we use it. The word's meaning does not properly apply to situations in which we are discussing killing a healthy animal for purely practical reasons.

This does not change the fact that killing companion animals for purely practical reasons is occasionally necessary. There are many unwanted pets in the UK and not enough resources to keep them all in adequate conditions.

Therefore, it could be argued

that the killing of healthy pets can sometimes be necessary to prevent them from ending up living in conditions that are below inadequate welfare standards.

In the particular ethical scenario discussed last month, I felt that it was the duty of the animal shelter to adequately explain their policies to the public, and to not mislead potential donors about their euthanasia policies.

As the vet acting for such a shelter I would have no ethical concerns about carrying out humane killing of pet animals on the basis of a lack of space for keeping them.

Decisions about which animals are the least likely to find homes, and, therefore, will be killed after a statutory period of time has passed to allow a new owner to come forward, are difficult but necessary.

However, I would be concerned about the shelter's lack of transparency regarding their policy. If the public is being misled about this, then I would feel that I was involved in a deceptive or even fraudulent activity by 'euthanasing' healthy animals under the care of this organisation.

Yvonne Black,
Market Rasen, UK

doi:10.1136/inp.g6402

Have you faced a dilemma that you would like considered in a future instalment of *Everyday Ethics*? If so, e-mail a brief outline to inpractice@bvaa-edit.co.uk. We pay a small honorarium for contributions that are published.