



**Mobility.** Help senior pets to get around by recommending products such as the Help 'Em Up Harness, a favorite of Gardner's. The harness has handles that make it easy to give dogs a hand with stairs, ramps, furniture and cars. Another idea: Suggest clients use yoga mats and bath mats to keep seniors from slipping on tile and wood floors. "Put one in front of their food bowl so they don't splay," suggests Gardner.

**The mind.** "Cognitive dysfunction is my most dreaded disease," says Gardner, noting that affected pets can spend all day and all night panting and pacing, among other anxiety symptoms. She suggests they visit their veterinarian sooner than later so that nutraceuticals, prescription diets and other treatment options can be started before it is too late.

**Incontinence.** Keeping the animals clean is key, Gardner notes. "Make sure they're not getting urine scaling and eventual infection," she advises. Shaving can help, as can baby wipes, baby powder and diaper creams.

"Get a wipes warmer at the baby store," she suggests. "Anything 'baby,' I love. It's usually waterproof and easier to clean." For dog beds, she suggests using baby mattress covers with elastic corners. Water-repellent fleece pads can help as well, she notes.

**Inappetence.** Lack of appetite is one of the main indicators pet owners use for their decision to request euthanasia, Gardner says. "It's hard to see pets lose weight and not be interested in food," she notes. She recommends Entyce appetite stimulant for dogs, and trying a variety of foods to see if pets have a preference. To avoid nausea from smell overload, tell clients to present the foods one at a time, she advises.

**Vision.** Lots of easy changes can help visually impaired pets get around safer. Placing stickers on glass doors can prevent pets from bumping into the glass, and "halos" affixed to dogs' collars with a harness will let them know what's in front of them and allow them go outside, Gardner says. In the case of one dog Gardner treated, "The

**TOP PROBLEMS FOR GERIATRIC PETS**

1. Mobility
2. Senility
3. Sleep disturbances
4. Energy levels
5. Pain
6. Heart problems
7. Kidney problems
8. Dental problems
9. Vision loss
10. Cancer

Source: Mary Gardner, DVM

# Grey Muzzle Club

**How you can help caregivers with geriatric pets—and tap into an underserved market.**

By Alison Otto

From the 80-lb. Golden Retriever struggling to stand up, to the 18-year-old graying cat with incontinence, geriatric pets can be a challenge for pet owners. Many geriatric pets are not getting enough care, and caregivers are stressed, says Mary Gardner, DVM, a co-founder of Lap of Love Veterinary Hospice.

That's where you can help. Geriatric pets make up an estimated 30% of the U.S. pet population, and your practice can do a world of good for these animals and your clients, Gardner says. At the 2020 virtual PSlvet Business Symposium, she outlined ideas for your eldest and most fragile patients—and their caregivers.



The Help 'Em Up Harness has handles to give dogs a hand.



“Find out what caregivers’ problems are and help them with those.”

– Mary Gardner, DVM

halo helped him to be notified before he hurt himself. Now he’s able to go be a part of the family environment and be outside,” she recalls.

**Attracting Clientele**

The challenge is getting these underserved patients into your clinic. Gardner estimates that 54% of cats and 40% of dogs are not seen by a veterinarian in the 1.5 years before they are euthanized, and almost 60% of pets are not seen in the 6 months before. Veterinary visits can be tricky because owners are often reluctant to put older pets through the trauma.

Gardner advises reaching

out to caregivers by cranking up the content about geriatric pets on your website. “It will take education and awareness of what struggles they’re going through. Lack of education will keep families away from your clinic,” she says. She advises dedicating 30% of content on your website to geriatrics. Include a list of 10 top geriatric pet ailments, and information on ramps and other products to help clients make their pets’ lives easier, she suggests.

**Market to Caregivers**

Make your website stand out with geriatric content that clients or potential

clients might not find elsewhere, such as assessing quality of life and how to monitor thermal regulation. Or show videos of pets waking up from anesthesia, Gardner suggests. She says that her most viewed page is “Is my pet too old for anesthesia?” (Find that article and more at Gardner’s website, [lapoflove.com](http://lapoflove.com).)

“Send out newsletters. Dedicate a page to the weak and wobbly. Do monthly Facebook lives, then put those onto your YouTube page,” she suggests. “We get a ton of traffic.”

Last but not least, Gardner advises, create a geriatric package for your clinic and offer specialized services such as laser therapy, rehab and hospice care. “Don’t make it frightening and say the end is near,” says Gardner. “Find out what caregivers’ problems are and help them with those.” ■

**Products for Geriatric Pets**

- Help ‘Em Up Harness. [helpemup.com](http://helpemup.com)
- Diapers and incontinence aids. [handicappedpets.com](http://handicappedpets.com)
- Lifts, fleece pads, etc. [fourflags.com](http://fourflags.com)
- Halos for blind dogs. [muffinshalo.com](http://muffinshalo.com)



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