

RADIATION AND CHEMOTHERAPY.

This often has frightening and negative associations for us, as we have often known people who have undergone such treatments and suffered side effects.

The goal of cancer treatment in animals is to improve the quality of the pet's life and so although some side effects can be seen, they are generally not as severe as in humans and most animals tolerate their treatments well.

Chemotherapy can now be offered in many cases in general practice, although in some cases a consultation with a specialist oncologist will still be necessary for further advice or treatment.

It is likely that a course of chemotherapy will last many weeks or months depending on the condition treated.

The availability and use of specialist radiotherapy is still quite restricted and so it is likely that you will be referred if this treatment is considered the best option for your pet. Radiotherapy normally requires a general anaesthetic and several treatments are given over a period of weeks.

Side effects can be seen with both treatments such as hair thinning or hair loss, nausea or vomiting, loss of appetite and low blood counts. Your pet will receive additional medicines to help with these, and receive regular blood checks to pick up any side effects with the treatment.



Summary

- The main goal in cancer treatment in animals is to maintain a good quality of life. This can be achieved with early diagnosis and treatments, and by good communication with your vet.
- If you are worried about anything or do not understand anything about your pet's diagnosis and treatment, then please ask the vet or nurse who will be happy to discuss your concerns.
- There are many different types of cancer, it is important to get a specific diagnosis so the best form of treatment can be planned for your pet.



XLVets Small Animal member veterinary practices work together to share experience, knowledge and ideas to ensure the highest levels of quality and care for their client's pets. XLVet member practices provide a compassionate and caring service for all pets and at the same time offer comprehensive and up-to-date treatment in all fields of veterinary medicine and surgery.

CANCER CARE



Cancer is a term used to describe a condition where abnormal cells divide without control. As in human medicine it is hard to say in most cases what has caused the cancer. Some possible causes include toxins and chemicals in the environment, faulty genes, infectious diseases or abnormalities in the animal's immune system.

Signs and Symptoms

Cancer can affect many different organs and systems of the body and so the symptoms that you might see are very diverse.

You may notice a lump on the skin of your pet, or you may see that they are losing weight, have poor appetite, lack of energy, or increased thirst.

There may be diarrhoea or vomiting if the cancer involves the gut. You may notice blood in your pet's stools or difficulty in passing faeces.

These vague symptoms may be associated with many diseases and so it would be very unusual to be able to diagnose cancer without further tests.

Further Investigations

Depending on the symptoms, additional tests may involve.

- Blood testing
- X-rays
- Ultrasound scan
- MRI or CT scan
- Sampling any lumps by needle or by biopsy

What is a fine needle aspirate?

If your pet has a lump the vet may take an aspirate of cells from it. The sample may be analysed in the practice laboratory or sent to a cytologist who will examine the cells for signs of cancer. The test can usually be done in a consultation and does not require a sedative or anaesthetic.

What if my pet needs a biopsy?

A biopsy can sometimes be done by a needle under sedation or is done under a general anaesthetic. The biopsy sample will be sent to a pathologist for examination.

A biopsy sample can be done before removing a lump so that the vet knows exactly what type of surgery to perform, or a sample can be taken during an operation to remove the lump.

Diagnosis:

What the vet will need to know:

In order to treat the cancer your vet will need to know:

- What sort of cancer it is
- Whether the cancer has spread (metastasized)
- Whether there are any complications related to the cancer elsewhere in the body or blood stream
- Whether the other organs are working well enough to tolerate an anaesthetic or chemotherapy treatment.

Sometimes tumours are called 'benign' or 'malignant'.

Benign tumours are more likely to be cured by surgery and do not spread to other parts of the body, either by local invasion or metastasis to distant sites.

Malignant tumours are more serious, as they can spread, and can recur, so may need additional treatments such as chemotherapy or radiotherapy.



Treatment/prevention:

Can cancer be treated?

This depends on many factors including what sort of cancer it is and what organs or systems are affected within the body. By carrying out the tests mentioned previously, the vet will be in a better position to tell you what treatments are available.

The most common treatment for a lump is surgery, which involves cutting out the tumour and any associated areas that are involved such as lymph nodes. Sometimes follow up treatment with chemotherapy or radiation is required.

Some tumours such as lymphoma is a cancer of a white blood cell called the lymphocyte. The symptoms of this disease can cause swelling of the lymph nodes all over the body, but can also affect other organs such as the kidney, liver and spleen. It can often be treated with chemotherapy and is one of the most commonly treated cancers in dogs and cats.

Some lymphomas can also be treated with radiotherapy.

Mammary cancer can be seen in dogs and cats, and is more commonly seen in those animals that have not been neutered. It appears as nodules within the mammary tissue or swelling of the mammary gland. Many of the drugs used in human medicine are not effective in mammary cancer in animals. This is best treated by early surgery.