

Newsletter of the COMMUNITY PRACTICE SERVICE

College of Veterinary Medicine, Washington State University
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Summer 2006

Treating Cancer in Pets: Palliative Care Requests Rise

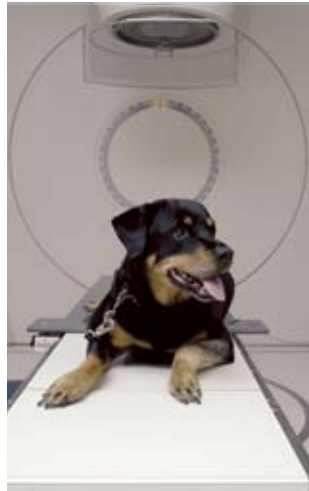
More treatment options for pets that have cancer exist today than ever before. In many cases, rigorous treatments such as surgery, chemotherapy, radiation therapy, or a combination of treatments may eliminate cancer in affected pets.

In other cases where the cancer has progressed to an advanced stage or is difficult to treat, palliative care may be an option. Palliative treatments help control cancer symptoms without curing it, and often make pets more comfortable, increase their quality of life, and slow the cancer's progression.

"Palliative radiation is a relatively economical intermediate treatment for people that can't afford long-term chemotherapy or radiation therapy," said **Dr. Raelynn Farnsworth**, a WSU clinical instructor and Community Practice veterinarian. "It is an alternative to euthanasia, yet is more direct than just administering pain medication to make the dog comfortable while waiting for the end.

"Palliative radiation, which involves a small number of high-dose treatments, can shrink a tumor and slow its growth," she said. "A normal course of radiation therapy for curative purposes involves multiple smaller doses. By administering a palliative protocol, the pet is often relieved of pain and other problems that cancer causes, and its life may be extended several months and maybe even years. The side effects of palliative radiation are also less than for a curative radiation protocol."

This has been true in the case of **Shyla**, a ten-year-old Rottweiler, owned by **Pullman Police Sgt. Dan Hargraves**. She was brought to the WSU Community Practice Service in August 2005 for examination of a



Shyla waiting for palliative radiation treatment administered by WSU's linear accelerator (background).

swollen leg and limp she had developed. She was diagnosed with osteosarcoma, a type of bone cancer that is generally treated with amputation and follow-up chemotherapy. Because arthritis was present in her other legs, Hargraves did not want Shyla's leg amputated and chose palliative radiation therapy to give her as long and comfortable a life as possible.

"In most cases, dogs will be euthanized due to the pain they experience in their leg," Dr. Farnsworth said. "For Shyla, the palliative treatment took away the pain in her leg, and retarded the tumor's growth without major expense."

While the treatment was only to extend her life a few months, Shyla returned to the WSU Veterinary Teaching Hospital seven months later in March 2006 for a second round of radiation therapy. "She seems to be doing well, and we are very pleased with her survival thus far," Dr. Farnsworth said.

Palliative treatment has also been effective in caring for **Pete**, a 14-year-old miniature schnauzer owned by **Dr. Duane Mickelsen**, a retired veterinarian and reproduction specialist who worked for decades at WSU's veterinary college. Pete was diagnosed with a malignant melanoma discovered by WSU veterinarians when the dog came in for a routine teeth cleaning in November 2005. The day of his dental work, Pete's tumor was removed.

"When the diagnosis came back melanoma, palliative radiation was recommended because for this tumor, the palliative protocol works best for local control," Dr. Farnsworth explained. "Pete's tumor is still highly likely to spread, so every two months

Continued on page 2

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In this issue:

Treating Cancer in Pets.....	1
WSU Oncology Service	2
Spayed and Neutered Pets May Live Longer and Healthier	3
Warm Weather Pet Tips	3
Yearly Exams for Exotic Animals	4
Why Does My Cat Bite Me?	5
Community Practice Team	5
WSU Community Practice News at the Speed of Light	6



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The WSU Oncology Service

The oncology service at WSU's Veterinary Teaching Hospital specializes in diagnosing and treating small animals with cancer.

"I would advise pet owners that cancer can be treated effectively in animals, and not to assume it is hopeless for a pet," said **Dr. Janean Fidel**, who heads WSU's oncology service and is a board-certified specialist in veterinary medical oncology and radiation oncology. "I estimate about 50 percent of the animals we treat experience long-term remission. The other 50 percent routinely have their lives extended, some up to a year or so.

"Often there are many treatments owners can choose from and we don't expect the owner to take the most expensive option," she said. "We try to come up with a treatment that will work best for the pet and its owner's circumstances."

Without a complete examination and diagnostic work-up, an oncologist cannot advise an owner about the best treatment options for cancer. "Any part of the body can become cancerous, although some parts more commonly than others," Dr. Fidel said. "And they all behave differently, so no two patients are the same."

Animals that come to WSU for an oncology visit without a referred diagnosis are examined and tests are performed for an accurate diagnosis. Exams can include a physical exam where a cancer may be detectable through palpation, medical imaging like x-rays and an MRI, biopsies, or bone marrow tests.

Once a diagnosis is made, treatment options depend on factors such as the pet's cancer type, location, what stage it is in, how old the animal is and its quality of life, and what the owner's circumstances are. "All of these factors make the treatment options highly variable," Dr. Fidel said.

Treatment options commonly involve surgery, radiation therapy, or chemotherapy, or a combination of these. Other options may include treating an animal for pain with oral medication. Many tumors can be removed surgically as a sole treatment, or in combination with chemotherapy or radiation therapy. Radiation therapy may also be a sole treatment or used in combination with surgery to control a tumor in a specific area.

WSU's Veterinary Teaching Hospital features a linear accelerator, one of the most advanced machines in the world dedicated to cancer treatment in animals. Using either electron radiation or high-energy x-rays, a patient's tumor can be treated with minimal impact to surrounding healthy tissue. Although most tumors are treated with 18-20 small fractions of radiation, one highly specific method of delivering radiation can be performed, similar to radiosurgery in humans. This technique is effective for treating very small brain tumors with a single dose of radiation.



The WSU Oncology Staff: (left to right) veterinary technician Rob Houston, Dr. Janean Fidel with Jake, veterinary technician Betsy Wheeler, and Dr. Rance Sellon

Chemotherapy can also be used to treat a variety of cancers that have spread throughout the body. This treatment may be used alone in some pets, or combined with surgery. In veterinary oncology, lower doses of chemotherapy are used than in human medicine, which result in fewer side effects.

On average, WSU's Oncology Service sees eight to ten new patients each week. Many travel from Seattle, Spokane, and areas in Idaho and Montana. Dr. Fidel heads the oncology service, along with veterinary technician **Betsy Wheeler** and veterinary radiation technician **Rob Houston**. At any time, up to six rotating veterinary students are being instructed by the service as well. **Dr. Rance Sellon**, head of veterinary internal medicine at WSU, also works with oncology cases.

"Most of the time our service is combined with the medicine service, and we work closely with small animal surgeons to provide the best care," Dr. Fidel said.

"For many owners, it is worth coming in and getting a pet evaluated just to see what can be done and what the options are," she said. "We provide pet owners with all possible options and a cost estimate for treatment."

For more information about oncology services at WSU, contact the WSU Veterinary Teaching Hospital at 509-335-0711.

Treating Cancer in Pets *continued from front page*

after radiation, his lymph nodes have been tested, and every four months x-rays are taken to monitor the growth of his cancer."

As of April 2006, Pete is alive and living as normal a life as possible.

"Depending on the tumor type, palliative radiation can be an option for people who want their pet with cancer to live as pain-free as possible," Dr. Farnsworth said.

Spayed and Neutered Pets May Live Healthier and Longer

There are many benefits from spaying and neutering pets. Sterilization surgery reduces pet overpopulation, and often makes animals easier to live with. The procedure eliminates their urge to urinate on furniture and other objects, keeps them from roaming in times of peak fertility, and generally makes them more docile and devoted to their owners.

Spayed and neutered pets also have several health advantages. “Males benefit from a reduction in diseases of the prostate gland as well as testicular cancer, and females experience a drastic reduction in cancers of the mammary glands,” said **Dr. Matt Mickas**, a WSU clinical assistant professor and head of the WSU Community Practice Service.

Females also benefit from a reduction in pyometra, a serious uterine infection common among adult fertile females. Because neutered pets tend to roam less, they also have less chance of contracting contagious diseases from other animals, getting into fights, and being injured in traffic.

Male animals are neutered by having their testicles removed, and female animals are spayed by having their ovaries and uterus removed. At least four animals are spayed and neutered at the WSU Veterinary Teaching Hospital daily.

The hospital’s caseload is made up of pets brought in by their owners from the general public and animals from surrounding local humane societies, including the Whitman County Humane Society in Pullman, the Humane Society of the Palouse in Moscow, and Hope’s Haven in St. Maries, Idaho.

“We are grateful for the support from our clients and the humane societies for the opportunity to provide this service not only for the benefits provided to their pets, but also because it gives WSU veterinary students an excellent educational opportunity,” Dr. Mickas said. He or **Dr. Gaylynn Clyde**, the Community Practice’s elective surgeon, is involved with each surgery, along with registered veterinary surgical technicians **Tami Montgomery** and **Melody Gerber**, and several rotating veterinary students.

“Each WSU veterinary student is responsible for two full days of spay and neuter surgeries in each rotation,” Dr. Mickas said. “For each surgery, there is one elective surgeon,

one technician, and one student. The first day, Dr. Clyde or I will scrub in and assist with instruction. The second day, we allow the students to have more primary responsibilities with our immediate supervision.

“It’s a really great program, and we encourage the public to bring in their pets, not only for the high standard of care provided, but also for the experience it provides our veterinary students.”

The recommended time to spay and neuter either dogs or cats is approximately five to six months of age after they have received a final round of vaccinations at approximately four months of age. Spay and neuter surgeries typically last about one hour, and price estimates can be provided over the phone.

Pets that undergo spay or neuter surgery tend to recover quickly, but need to be supervised and have their activity restricted to allow proper healing. This prevents suture sites from becoming irritated or infected. Medications for pain management are prescribed for patients to assist in comfort during the healing process.

“The main things to watch for are swelling, pain, and discharge at the incision site,” Dr. Mickas said. “Infection is a rare occurrence, but may occur from a pet licking at the healing incision site. This can be prevented by the pet wearing a bowl-like collar called an Elizabethan collar.”

For more information about spays and neuters or to schedule an appointment, contact the small animal appointment desk in the WSU Veterinary Teaching Hospital at 509-335-0751.



Leon

Warm Weather Pet Tips

Exercise and Heat

In warm weather, it may be necessary to limit walking/jogging distances and the length of time outside exercising with a dog. Take pets for walks during the cooler morning and evening hours, and carry along an adequate, fresh, water supply. Pets, like children, should never be left unattended in a car during warm weather.

If overheating occurs, cool your pet first and then seek veterinary attention soon. Signs of overheating include heavy, rapid panting, a body temperature of 104 degrees F or more, weakness, diarrhea or vomiting, seizures, and potentially coma or death.



To get a pet’s body temperature down, soak it in a tub of cool water or use wet towels to wet the skin, place the pet in front of a fan, and call a veterinarian.

Plants

Some common garden plants such as irises, azaleas, rhododendrons, tomato plants, and onions can cause pets to experience abdominal pain, nausea, and vomiting if ingested. Others such as rhubarb, tiger lilies, and Easter lilies can cause kidney failure or death in cats. Though pets do not commonly seek out these plants, they may nibble from time

Continued on page 4

Warm Weather Pet Tips *continued from page 3*

to time and become ill. For a complete list of plants that are harmful to pets, go online to the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center at www.apcc.aspc.org.

Chemicals

Fertilizers, insecticides, and snail/slug baits can also be hazardous to pets. When planning your garden, consult with manufacturers, lawn care companies, and pest control companies regarding hazards to pets. Most importantly, read and follow all label directions when using any chemical. If you think your pet has been poisoned, contact the WSU Veterinary Teaching Hospital emergency service at 509-335-0711.

Allergies

Clinical signs of seasonal or chronic allergies in pets include chewing, licking, head shaking, and scratching. If your pet is experiencing these signs, call us for an appointment.

Ticks and Fleas

Ticks can carry a number of diseases harmful to you and your pet, including Lyme Disease and Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever. A number of preventative treatments are available,

including a Preventic™ collar (ticks), Advantix™ (fleas/ticks/mosquitoes) for dogs, or Frontline™ (fleas/ticks) for dogs or cats. Contact the WSU Community Practice Service with any questions about which treatments are most suitable for your pet.

Vacations and Travel

When traveling with your pet, WSU's veterinary college recommends preventative medications for fleas and heartworms. Remember to carry a copy of your pet's current rabies and health certificate. If you plan to board your pet, proof of current vaccinations is required. And never travel without bringing a collar and leash, proof of ownership in case the pet is lost, and food and water for the trip.

Fourth of July Festivities

Fireworks can upset pets and cause them to injure themselves while trying to get away from the noise. It is best to leave pets at home in a safe, secure, and quiet location. Provide pets with familiar toys, treats, and chews to offer some positive distraction. The WSU Community Practice can help pets with potential anxiety problems before the holiday arrives.

Yearly Exams for Exotic Animals Important



Kalayla, a Western Rosella Parakeet

Non-traditional pets, including ferrets, pot bellied pigs, and a variety of birds and reptiles, benefit from yearly exams, blood work, and vaccinations, just like other pets and people do.

Annual exams can uncover developing diseases or illnesses, detect age-related changes such as the progression of arthritis, and create a personal database of information on a particular pet that is useful to a veterinarian as the animal ages.

"With past blood work, we can see actual changes over time in that particular animal, instead of relying on published normals that indicate if an animal is healthy or not," said

Dr. Nickol Finch, a WSU clinical

instructor who specializes in zoological animal medicine and helps run the Exotic Animal Service at the college.

This is especially true for birds, of which some species might live up to 70 or more years. "Yearly blood work would show even the slightest changes that might alert us to a potential problem, and allow for better monitoring," Dr. Finch said. In addition to older birds, blood work may

uncover obesity and liver problems in younger birds fed a seed-based diet.

Annual examinations can also include dental exams to identify and halt oral problems. Rabbits commonly benefit because dental disease in rabbits that may eventually stop them from eating. "A rabbit can have its teeth trimmed when it comes in before the teeth have grown so much that the rabbit stops eating and gets sick," Dr. Finch said.

Cancers such as lymphoma may also be caught early in ferrets before the disease spreads throughout the body, making chemotherapy treatment possible. Yearly vaccinations are also available for pot-bellied pigs and ferrets.

Additionally, veterinarians can address animal care issues and concerns that owners may have. "We can discuss husbandry issues, such as the proper temperature and light for reptiles, proper eating habits, and try to come up with solutions for behavior problems that may have arisen," Dr. Finch said.

To schedule an annual exam for your pet, contact the WSU Veterinary Teaching Hospital at 509-335-0711.

The Exotic and Wildlife Service and the WSU Veterinary Teaching Hospital specializes in taking care of and rehabilitating wild birds, raptors such as eagles and owls, reptiles, and mammals such as rabbits, mice, raccoons, and squirrels. This service also treats pet birds, ferrets, snakes, fish, and other nontraditional pet species.

Why Does My Cat Bite or Scratch Me?

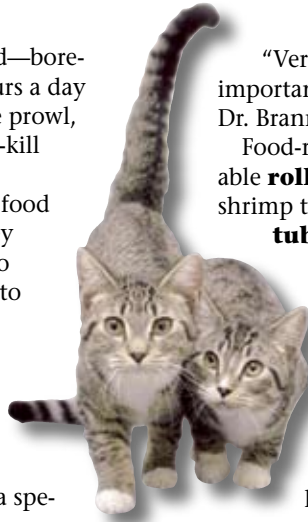
The answer could be as simple as one word—boredom. Cats in the wild spend about eight hours a day hunting and foraging for food. When on the prowl, they instinctively go through a stalk-pounce-kill sequence to catch their prey.

While many domestic indoor cats acquire food more easily through their caring owners, they still have the natural killer instinct. And if no other alternatives are around, cats may turn to their owners for this source of “fun.”

“The stalk-pounce-kill sequence is not targeted toward people, but if you are their only source of play, then inappropriate behavior such as biting or scratching may occur,” said **Dr. Julia Brannan** of the WSU Community Practice Service, who has a special interest in pet behaviors. Some owners may unintentionally encourage this type of behavior through contact playing, or through a lack of environmental stimulation.

“The number one reason why cats are aggressive with their owners is that they have been encouraged to play inappropriately,” Dr. Brannan said. “You can’t be the source of all their play behavior, but you can create a stimulating environment for them to play in.”

Common environmental enrichment ideas include **kitty condos** or **cat trees** that can house food and toys and **tunnels** and **cat walks** throughout the house or yard. Some cats respond to **new resting and hiding places** and **different textures** to lie on.



Clappy and Whistler

“Vertical spacing, such as on a cat tree, is especially important when there is more than one cat in the house,” Dr. Brannan said.

Food-related enrichment can include commercially available **roll-a-treat balls**, or making stimulating chicken or shrimp treats by placing cooked food bits in **toilet paper tubes** and folding the edges up.

“Consider ideas like putting decorative cinder blocks on edge and dropping treats in it for the cat to find, troubleshoot, and retrieve,” Dr. Brannan said. “You can also take cat food and hide it in little condiment cups in different locations in the house, but be sure they are out of reach of dogs.”

Catnip is another common feline stimulator, but not all cats enjoy it. Those that do will either lick, eat, sniff, or roll in it. A small rug with catnip sprinkled on it will provide for any of these behaviors. To satisfy chewing behaviors, a good idea may be to plant a “cat garden” with such plants

as **wheat** and **oat grasses**, **catnip**, **parsley**, **thyme**, and other plants appropriate for cats. Some cats may also enjoy chewing on rawhide or pig’s ears.

Cats also enjoy **stalking-for-prey games**, such as feather wand toys, wall-mounted cat dancers, and remote control toys. “It helps to rotate toys and only bring out one or two a day and put the others ones away where the cats can’t get them,” Dr. Brannan said.

For more environmental enrichment tips, contact Dr. Brannan at the WSU Veterinary Teaching Hospital at 509-335-0711 or look online at the Indoor Cat Initiative at www.nssvet.org/ici/index.php.

Your WSU Community Practice Team

The veterinarians of the WSU Community Practice offer a full range of services for small animals without referral. These services include basic care, vaccinations, dental exams, geriatric checkups, and more advanced diagnostics and care for sick animals.

We work together as a team to provide efficient and comprehensive care for all of our patients. The Community Practice Service operates like a regular veterinary practice, but with the added benefit of access to veterinary specialists in virtually every area of small animal medicine and surgery, as well as the best-equipped veterinary teaching hospital in the Northwest with 24-hour emergency and ICU care. You can be sure that your pet is receiving the best possible care at the WSU Community Practice.



Your Community Practice Team: back row (left to right) Drs. GayLynn Clyde, Nickol Finch, Raelynn Farnsworth, and Matthew Mickas. Front row (left to right) veterinary technicians Angela Teal, Tami Montgomery, and Melody Gerber.



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WSU Community Practice News at the Speed of Light!

Beginning January 1, 2007, the WSU Community Practice Service newsletter will be available to our readers via e-mail. Instead of waiting for a hard copy in the mail, the newsletter will arrive in your e-mail inbox as a Web link to the WSU College of Veterinary Medicine Web site to peruse at your convenience.

In it, you will be able to find out what's new with the WSU Community Practice Service, pet health information, behavioral, nutritional, and safety tips, specialty services offered at the WSU Veterinary Teaching Hospital, and the latest information on emerging small animal diseases. You can also keep track of critical contact information for the Veterinary Teaching Hospital and college Web site. Online, the newsletter will also offer the advantages of Internet hotlinks to the people and programs you read about.



The newsletter is published quarterly, and sent to teaching hospital clients, referring veterinarians, and pet lovers in general.

If you would like to keep receiving the newsletter electronically for free, simply go online to the WSU College of Veterinary Medicine Web site at **www.vetmed.wsu.edu/depts-vth/newsletters/** and enroll. There, previous issues of the Community Practice Service newsletter can also be found. Those who prefer a hard copy of the newsletter can subscribe for a \$25 annual fee to receive four quarterly issues by U.S. Mail. To request a hard copy, you can mail this slip to the address below, call 509-335-3100, or go to the WSU veterinary Web site.

Hard copy mailings to non-subscribers will cease on January 1, 2007, so be sure to reply soon.

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- I would like to make a donation to the WSU College of Veterinary Medicine to support important small animal services and research being performed to improve pet health everywhere. Enclosed is my check, made payable to Washington State University Foundation.

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