

Chemotherapy in Pets By Dr. Meredith Phillips

Opening Hours

Monday-Friday 8am-6.15pm

Saturday 8am-5pm

Sunday 9am-5pm (Closed 12.30-1.30pm)

All consultations by appointment.
Phone 62884944

Closed Public Holidays.

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The diagnosis of cancer can be stressful for pet owners, and the prospect of chemotherapy treatments can be equally difficult. However the fear that pets may spend a lot of their time unwell from chemotherapy treatments is unwarranted. Knowing how anti-cancer chemotherapy drugs work and what to expect from these medications can help pet owners decide whether such treatment is right for their pet.

At Weston Creek Veterinary Hospital we have a purpose built ward for chemotherapy treatments and access to protocols designed by specialists to offer your pet the most advanced therapy possible.

Chemotherapy may be used as the sole treatment for some cancers, or may be used in combination with other treatments such as surgery. It is likely to be recommended for cancers with a high chance of spread to other areas of the body, for tumours that occur at more than one site, or to rid the body of microscopic cancer cells that cannot or have not been completely removed surgically. It may be used after surgery to help prevent or delay regrowth or spread.

Chemotherapy drugs work by attacking cells in the process of rapid growth. However chemotherapeutic drugs cannot tell the difference between malignant cancer cells and normal cells. Toxicity to normal, rapidly growing or self-renewing tissues in the body is the reason for most of the side effects seen with chemotherapy. Fortunately, these normal tissues continue to grow and repair themselves, so the injury caused by chemotherapy is rarely permanent.

Compared to people receiving chemotherapy, pets experience fewer and less severe side effects because we use lower doses of drugs and do not combine as many drugs

as in human patients. The normal tissues that are the most sensitive to chemotherapy are the intestinal lining, the bone marrow (which makes red and white blood cells) and hair follicles. Toxic effects on the gut cells are responsible for decreased appetite, vomiting, and diarrhoea. In most cases these signs are mild and resolve on their own. Suppression of the bone marrow may cause a drop in the white blood cell count, leading to increased susceptibility to infection. Certain breeds of dogs may experience variable amounts of hair loss. We seldom see severe side effects; it is estimated to be less than 5% of all pets receiving chemotherapy. With proper management most animals recover uneventfully in a few days. It is possible however for any animal to have an unexpected reaction to any medication.

How a chemotherapeutic drug is given and how many treatments are needed varies from case to case. The type of cancer, extent of the disease, and general health of the animal help the oncologists to design a treatment schedule. Some drugs are tablets that are given at home. Others are injections that require a morning stay in hospital. The treatments are typically repeated from weekly to every few weeks. The duration of treatment depends on the type of cancer and the extent of the disease.

For cancers that cannot be cured, the goal of chemotherapy is to improve the patient's quality of life. It is used to minimise discomfort caused by the tumour, or to slow down or arrest the progression of the disease.

Deciding whether to opt for chemotherapy treatments for your pet can be complex. Medical information, practical concerns such as the need for repeat visits, and financial responsibility are some factors that can play a part in this decision. These concerns should be discussed with your veterinarian.

March 2007

Weston Creek Veterinary Hospital
200 Badimara Street
Waramanga. ACT 2611

Phone: 62884944

Fax: 62889190

Email: feedback@wcvh.com.au



Tara 1 month after chemotherapy.

Meet Tara

By Meredith Phillips, Veterinary Surgeon.

Tara is a loving and enthusiastic Staffy who turns 6 years old this month. She came in to our hospital when her owner noticed some lumps on her neck. These lumps were enlarged lymph nodes.

Tara had blood tests and a biopsy of her lymph nodes. The diagnosis reached was B cell lymphoma.

Lymphoma is a relatively common cancer in dogs. Chemotherapy is the mainstay of treatment for lymphoma. Most lymphoma patients treated with chemotherapy will go into remission. Remission is not a cure but does allow for a good quality of life.

Initially Tara had a day stay in hospital every 1 to 2 weeks for chemotherapy injections. She also had tablets to take at home. In between injections Tara had regular blood tests to check her blood cell counts. When these counts were too low treatments were delayed to allow her cells to return to normal.

Tara responded well to chemotherapy, with her swollen lymph nodes shrinking almost back to normal size after her first treatment. She finished her 19 week chemotherapy protocol at the end of January and is now in remission. She will come in every few months for a check up to monitor for any recurrence of her lymphoma.

Tara is a wonderful character and likes to personally go into the receptionist area to say goodbye and have a pat on her way home!

Breed Profile: Turkish Van Cat

By Karen Whinray, Veterinary Nurse.

The Turkish Van is a rare and ancient breed that developed in the area which today encompasses Iran, Iraq, southwest Soviet Union and eastern Turkey. 'Van' is a common term in the region that has been given to a number of towns, villages and even a lake. The uniquely patterned cat native to the region was named the 'Vancat' by the residents. They were brought to England in 1955 and named Turkish cats, later changed to Turkish Van to avoid confusion with the Turkish Angora.

The Turkish Van is a large white semi-longhaired cat with coloured markings on the head and tail. Colour markings are limited to auburn, cream, blue, black and tortoiseshell. Eye

colour is either amber or blue, or even one of each. The coat has a cashmere texture and does not have an undercoat. Because of this they are not as difficult as most longhairs to keep well-groomed as their fur does not knot. A good brush once or twice a week will keep them looking good and reduce the amount of white hair on your furniture and clothes.

The coat is also water resistant which goes hand in hand with one of their personality traits of having an insatiable curiosity for water. A few are not interested, but the majority can be found dipping their paws, toys and bedding in water bowls, or sitting in sinks and baths waiting for the tap to be turned on.

Turkish Vans have a wonderful temperament often described as dog-like and are great with kids. They are very lively and playful, and fetch and catch are popular games. They are loving and demonstrative pets who frequently chatter in answer to their owners.

Pale skin on the ears and nose can make them susceptible to sunburn and skin cancer, but overall Turkish Vans are a strong, healthy breed. They have an average lifespan of 10-12 years, although they can live much longer.



Karen with Khan Long, Turkish Van, visiting us for his dental.