



Perth Veterinary Oncology

Melanoma

Canine oral melanoma

Melanomas are relatively common tumours in dogs, but rare in cats. In both species they can range in behaviour from benign (harmless) to malignant (potentially fatal). For many animals with a melanoma of the skin, surgical removal is curative. The most accurate way to predict the behaviour of a skin tumour is to have a sample sent to the laboratory. Melanomas in locations other than the skin, such as inside the mouth in dogs, or in the eyes of cats are generally more aggressive than the skin form. There are many ways we treat patients with melanoma:

1. **Surgery. This is the best first-line therapy**, and is usually successful in preventing the tumour growing back at the same site. Unfortunately, there are no tests available that detect the tumour elsewhere until the disease is very advanced. In general, if the tumour appears malignant at the laboratory or occurs in a dog's mouth or cat's eye, it usually has already spread elsewhere in the body, and most often to the lungs, even though it may not be visible on x-rays for some time.
2. **Intralesional chemotherapy. Injecting chemotherapy drugs into the tumour reduces the tumour to the microscopic level at its original site in about half of all cases.** The doses used are too small to cause any side effects, and generally only require sedation and local anaesthetic. Most commonly, 4 treatments are given, each a week apart. Not all patients are suitable for this treatment.
3. **Systemic chemotherapy.** This form of chemotherapy is used to treat the whole body and hence fight cancer wherever it has spread to. The way in which this is done in animals results in no serious side effects in 95% of patients. It is only used in patients who are at very high risk of their cancer having spread through the body.
4. **Anti-blood vessel treatment.** In patients with very advanced disease but good quality of life, treatment against the blood vessels is more effective than fighting the cancer itself. Successful treatment limits further growth of the tumour.
5. **Vaccination.** A vaccine is available that trains the immune system against the cancer and has been proven to maintain quality of life for much longer in dogs with advanced disease. The vaccine is given through the skin but without the use of a needle. It is administered on an out-patient basis, on four occasions each 2 weeks apart. Each visit is similar to those for the preventive vaccinations many dogs receive annually.
6. **Nutritional changes and pain control.** There are several changes that can be tailored to individual patient's diets to improve quality of life. Pain control can be helpful in animals with advanced disease even if they do not show signs of pain.

Your veterinarian will advise you on how best to commence diagnosing and treating your pet's cancer. At some point, a specialist opinion may be helpful to offer advice, or to commence some of the therapies listed above. Your veterinarian can organise referral to Perth Veterinary Oncology, at Perth Veterinary Specialists. At the time of consultation, you will be given as much information as possible on how effective any treatments are likely to be for your particular pet, how much cost will

likely be involved, and whether any reactions to the particular treatments are expected.

In addition, we are able to advise on nutritional and other aspects designed to help your pet fight and/or tolerate the cancer better.

Referral to Perth Veterinary Oncology is easily organised through your usual veterinarian. Dr Ken Wyatt is the only Veterinary Oncologist in Western Australia.

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