

Canine Lymphoma

Information For Pet Owners

Lymphoma is the most common blood cancer in dogs and arises from a type of white blood cell called a lymphocyte which is present throughout the body. For this reason, the cancer can arise in any tissue of the body. However, the most common appearance in the dog is the presence of multiple enlarged "glands" or lymph nodes which often can be felt at home. Some dogs also feel unwell. Other dogs just have the enlarged lymph nodes.

Lymphoma is a very rapidly progressive disease and without treatment unfortunately, most dogs will die within a month of diagnosis.

Because lymphoma occurs throughout the body, it cannot usually be treated surgically. However, fortunately it is very responsive to treatment with chemotherapy and radiation.

There are two broad types of lymphoma - T cell and B cell tumours. The commoner B cell tumours tend to respond better to treatment than the T cell tumours.

A large majority of dogs with B-cell lymphoma (80 to 90%) will respond successfully to the initial chemotherapy treatment and the lymph nodes and other tissues will return to normal - the dog is then "in remission".

The other good news about dogs and chemotherapy is that the great majority of dogs have little of the side-effects that are associated with chemotherapy in humans.

The current "standard of care" chemotherapy treatment for dogs involves the use of 3 different chemotherapy drugs over a period of about 5 months.

Although the short-term results of this treatment are excellent, longer term response is not so common with this "standard of care" chemotherapy. The average time that a dog stays "in remission" for is about one year from starting the chemotherapy. So in most cases, a year of good quality of life is achieved. However, only about 10% of dogs treated will live for 2 years or longer.

There is very good evidence however from studies overseas, that if a short radiotherapy treatment is added to the "standard of care" chemotherapy, longer term survival is much improved (40% of dogs will live for 2 years or longer). Again, the radiotherapy is very well tolerated in the vast majority of dogs.

Both radiotherapy and chemotherapy for lymphoma are now available at Brisbane Veterinary Specialist Centre and this is the only veterinary hospital offering this type of radiotherapy in Australia. Ask your veterinarian for a referral. To then book an appointment phone (07) 3264 9400.