



## Perth Veterinary Oncology

# Lymphoma

Lymphoma is the most common cancer formed from blood cells that occurs in dogs and cats. However, the chance of any one dog developing this disease over any one-year period is less than 1 in 1000. This disease is similar to non-Hodgkin's lymphoma in people, and has been called lymphosarcoma and malignant lymphoma. The different names don't indicate any difference in the condition. Lymphocytes are the type of white blood cells that produce antibodies (B cells) and help to fight against viruses and cancers (T cells). Most lymphomas are due to cancerous B cells. Because the natural behaviour of lymphocytes is to circulate around the body, the same behaviour continues once they become cancerous. They are typically systemic, or body-wide, regardless of where the disease is detectable. **For most, the cause of the disease is unknown, although there may be a connection in dogs to heavy exposure to paints and solvents, high voltage power lines and 2,4 D herbicide. In cats, sharing a house with smokers can increase the risk as does FIV (the feline "AIDS" virus) and Feline Leukaemia Virus. Dog breeds such as the boxer and golden retriever appear to be at increased risk.** There has been a line of bullmastiffs reported with an extremely high risk of lymphoma. The exact reasons for these predispositions are unknown.

The disease is rapidly fatal for most. Most dogs and cats succumb within 2 months of diagnosis if treatment is not initiated promptly. This is an average figure – some will have less aggressive forms and live for 6 or 7 months, whilst some will decline within days. Tests run on a biopsy of the tumour can accurately determine the sub-type of lymphoma, and whether the disease is likely to behave in an aggressive manner or not. These tests also determine what types of medication are likely to be most effective. At Perth Veterinary Oncology, the biopsies for these tests are usually done by taking core samples rather than a surgical approach. This minimally invasive test allows for rapid recovery and minimal discomfort.

Most dogs develop the high-grade (aggressive and rapid) form. Treatment can be either palliative or can aim to reduce the cancer burden directly. Palliative therapy often includes corticosteroid ("cortisone") tablets, which can produce a dramatic short-term benefit in about half of all patients. Length of life is not improved, but quality of life is often much better. The only therapy proven to be very effective in pets is medical therapy. Drugs are used to kill large numbers of cancer cells (well over 99%), which places the patient into remission. **Remission means that the tumour cannot be detected, and is unable to cause any symptoms. Hence your pet will have normal quality of life.** For the majority of patients there exists a therapeutic "window" such that medication can result in complete remission for good periods of time, with ZERO side effects. With all treatments, there exists a risk, and around 1 in 20 patients will have serious reactions to the medication.

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

Dr Ken Wyatt BSc BVMS FANZCVS,  
Registered Specialist in Veterinary Oncology,

Perth Veterinary Oncology  
305 Selby Street,  
Osborne Park, WA  
Ph: 9204 0400