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Chemotherapy in Pets

Chemotherapy (use of drugs) is now widely used to treat cancer in animals. The ultimate goal of cancer treatment in animals is to improve survival and **quality** of life for the patient. This is different to human medicine where the aim is often to cure the disease, so side-effects such as vomiting are not tolerated and chemotherapy drugs would be reduced or withdrawn if something like this occurred. Chemotherapy is used commonly in cancers that cannot be treated surgically, e.g. lymphosarcoma. Although side-effects can occur to these drugs, the aim is to minimize these side effects so that they do not affect the quality of life of the patient.

Factors affecting the suitability of patients for chemotherapy
• Tumour type • Tumour stage – how far has the tumour spread already • General health of animal • Age of animal • Cost considerations, some chemo drugs are expensive • Owner understanding and toleration for side effects • Animal personality – will the animal take tablets? Is the animal afraid of coming to the vets as frequent visits may be needed?

There are a wide range of drugs used to treat cancer; these drugs are often used in combination. The benefit of using several different drugs is that there is a decreased risk of side effects and the tumour is less likely to become resistant to the treatment. Some chemotherapy drugs are tablets to be given at home, others are injections which need to be given at the surgery. These injections are usually given into the vein in the front leg, some take a little while to administer. Animals receiving these injections will need to stay at the surgery for a few hours at most.

The correct chemotherapy regime for your pet requires careful consideration and the following points are important to bear in mind. These will all be discussed with your veterinary surgeon before deciding which chemotherapy to use. Chemotherapy is not right for every patient or for every client. Animals receiving chemotherapy are monitored closely and may need regular blood and urine samples to check for possible side effects.