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Hands-On Homecare: Involving Owners of Cancer Patients

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Hands-on Homecare: Involving owners of cancer patients

A cancer diagnosis is one of the scariest messages an owner of a pet may get and a veterinarian may give. There are many preconceived opinions and attitudes toward cancer that may interfere with treatment and the quality of life that the pet can continue to have. A few clients will want to do everything possible while others elect euthanasia and no treatment. Others desire only palliative care, either due to limited finances or other personal reasons.

It is our job as veterinary professionals to educate ourselves on cancer diagnoses and treatments out there whether our clinic does the treatments or not. We are the only source of information the owner has at the moment of diagnosis and what we say will influence decisions made about the care of the patient.

Ultimately, it is the decision of the owner as to the outcome of the pet, our patient. If we can give the owner good, responsible advice regarding treatment, standard, complementary and alternative, then the best outcome for the quality of remaining life for the patient can be achieved.

As veterinary technicians, we are on the front line of how the owner may really feel about treatments for their pet. While taking histories, we see the real client. Clients are many times more comfortable with the tech than the veterinarian.

But as a team, we can make the client more comfortable with a sad diagnosis; help them through it and teach them ways they can help with patient care and feel part of the team.

Veterinary cancer care is very similar to that of human cancer care and becomes more alike as we share ideas and treatments between the species. We have learned that some of the same successes in human medicine can be translated to animal medicine and vice versa. Some of those areas are nutrition, supplements, massage, acupuncture and acupressure. However, a lot of controversy still surrounds the ideas used in complementary and alternative medicine. But many studies have shown that the use of complementary medicine does improve the life of the patient, if not actually help in the treatment of the cancer using standard means.

In order to provide the best life for the patient, we must go beyond the time the pet spends at the hospital. Home care can complement our care for the other 20 hours in the day the pet has. Participating in the care gives owners an active role in the health care of the pet and lessens the sting of the diagnosis for all of the patient's care team.