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**NEW
DIRECTIONS
IN** *Cancer
Care*

Oncology expert
pioneers research
and treatments not
just for dogs, but
also people.

By Ernie Slone

DOG FANCY
spoke with Post about
his work to develop
breakthrough cancer
therapies for both
humans and pets.



COURTESY THE VETERINARY CANCER CENTER

Gerald S. Post, D.V.M., says researchers are “increasingly realizing that both the molecular and the genetic drivers for cancer in dogs and people are the same.”

An avid scuba diver and wildlife conservationist, Gerald S. Post, D.V.M., has labored to help save endangered species, from cheetahs and gorillas to Tasmanian devils. But the board-certified veterinary oncologist is best known for more than 20 years of work developing innovative approaches and pioneering efforts in the fight against cancer, the No. 1 natural cause of death in older dogs, according to the oncologist.

Post founded and is principal of The Veterinary Cancer Center in Norwalk, Conn., which at 8,000 square feet is the largest stand-alone veterinary comparative oncology center in the United States, dedicated to the study and treatment of cancers in pets that occur similarly in humans.

He also founded the Animal Cancer Foundation, which promotes the field of comparative oncology. Post believes that by working together, veterinary and human oncologists can discover more-effective and less-toxic treatments for both pets and people.



COURTESY THE VETERINARY CANCER CENTER

The Veterinary Cancer Center in Norwalk, Conn., is dedicated to the study and treatment of cancers in pets that occur similarly in humans.

Q: We understand that an experience with a much-beloved dog accounts for part of your passion in fighting cancer. Tell us about that.

A: You can read the story of Smokey on my website. He was a Miniature Schnauzer, and when he was 13, he was diagnosed with metastatic melanoma. When I looked at the X-rays, I knew he had about three months to live. As you can imagine, I wasn't all too thrilled about that.

So I called basically every human and veterinary oncologist in the country, and we did three experimental therapies on him, and he had another two-and-a-half years of incredibly fabulous life. So my goal, and this practice's goal, is to make sure that everybody has that opportunity.

Q: Can you share with us the scope of the cancer problem in dogs?

A: First let me say that cancer is not a death sentence. Our ability to treat and in some instances cure cancer is increasing by leaps and bounds every day.

Cancer is a huge problem in the pet world, and also in the human world. There are 6 million new cases of cancer in dogs every year. Cancer is the leading cause of death in mature dogs. Fifty percent of dogs older than age 10 will die of cancer.

Q: Why are you so excited about the field of comparative oncology? How can understanding cancer in dogs help treat or cure cancer in people?

A: Comparative oncology is the study of spontaneous cancers in multiple species. We are just at the beginning. Recently, I was in California lecturing at a melanoma convention, basically educating physicians and cancer researchers and cancer biologists on what we know, and trying to break down those silos that exist in medicine and research and academia so that we can all share the knowledge for the betterment of both pets and people.

Working and studying and learning about cancers in dogs, or animals, down to the genetic level, can help them but also can help people. We are increasingly realizing that both the



The Veterinary Cancer Center participates in clinical trials, helping to evaluate new ways of treating and diagnosing cancer.

molecular and the genetic drivers for cancer in dogs and people are the same.

Now that we know the genetics of cancer, we can match that to what is going on in people, figure out what things work, what things don't work. My fear is that the dog and the cat are the canaries in the coal mine right now. The environmental factors that are causing cancer in these animals, we are going to see these cancers a lot sooner and a lot more dramatically in dogs and cats than we are in us.

Q: What are the practical advantages of testing cancer treatments on dogs and other animals?

A: Because dogs live a more compressed life span than people do, we can get information that not only will help dogs, but also help people in one-tenth or shorter the time. And for far less economic costs as well.

Every dog that has cancer, every animal, can participate in some way, shape, or form, whether it is by giving a DNA sample of the tumor and the animal, or tracking the progress.

Q: What sort of work is being done at your cancer center?

A: The genetics of cancer are being studied by multiple places, and our center has one of the highest submission rates for samples. When we have an animal who has cancer, we get samples from the dog's genetics as well as tumor samples to send to various institutions, to better enable them to characterize these cancers on a genetic level. That's one of the ways we are participating in numerous studies.

We are the Northeast site of Animal Clinical Investigation. They (ACI) are

probably the largest veterinary cancer clinical research organization or contract research organization. They administer clinical trials in veterinary oncology. We are the premier site for them as far as case accrual.

Right now we are participating in two studies involving the treatment of cancer, different types of cancer, with novel therapies.

Q: What is one of the most exciting aspects of your comparative oncology research?

A: If you look at pediatric cancer and veterinary cancer, they are very similar.

Eighty percent of cancers in children are lymphomas, leukemias, brain tumors, and soft tissue sarcomas. That is very different than in adult humans, where 80 percent of the cancers are carcinomas: breast, prostate, lung, pancreatic.

If you look at dogs, they are much more like children.

If we were to be able to take information about therapies or new therapies that we are trying in dogs that work, and see it apply not only to dogs, but also to kids . . . it is so exciting for us. We all hope for success, and that's wonderful, but it is also important to know that a therapy doesn't work. We are likely to get that information far more rapidly in dogs than we would in kids. Knowing that a therapy doesn't work may be just as important as knowing that it does.

To learn more about The Veterinary Cancer Center, visit www.vcchope.com **DF**

ERNIE SLONE is editor of DOG FANCY magazine and DogChannel.com.