

From Diagnosis to Recovery: Nero Fights Cancer with Ryan Hospital's Comprehensive Cancer Care Team

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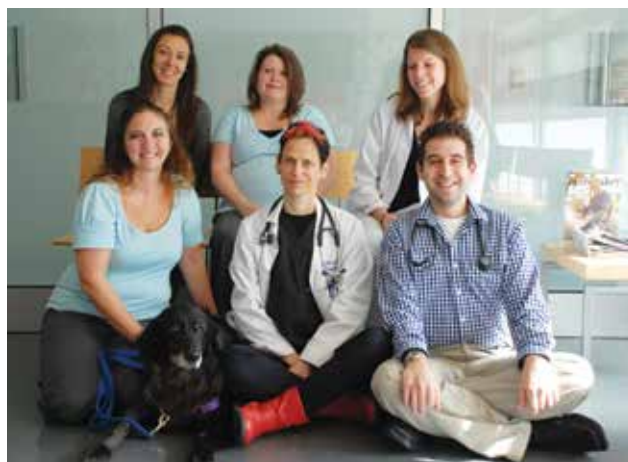
Few things are as devastating and scary for pet owners as a cancer diagnosis for their beloved pet. And that is exactly how Nancy and Gary Lewis felt when they received the news that their 13-year-old Golden Retriever/Black Labrador mix, Nero, had a soft tissue sarcoma on his right front leg. Sarcomas are malignant tumors that arise from various sources including connective tissue, fat, blood vessels, nerve sheaths, and muscle cells.

Since his adoption from the Morris Animal Refuge in Philadelphia 12 years ago, Nero has been a treasured member of the Lewis family, providing many years of joyful companionship. When he needed advanced care for his cancer, the Lewises chose to bring him to Penn Vet's Ryan Hospital.

THE COMPREHENSIVE CANCER CARE APPROACH

Cancer is a diverse and complex disease with a wide range of clinical outcomes. For many people, deciding the course of treatment for their pet can be emotionally difficult and overwhelming. Options vary widely and can include therapeutic interventions such as surgery, chemotherapy, radiation therapy, and supportive care. Many pets diagnosed with cancer require a combination of these treatments. Navigating through separate appointments with various clinicians, weighing multiple options, and deciding on the optimal treatment course can often become confusing and stressful for pet owners.

The Lewises, however, had a very different experience. This July, Ryan Hospital implemented a Comprehensive Cancer Care Program – a multidisciplinary approach to evaluate and treat cancer patients. The goal of the program is to deliver the best care, more efficient service, and a more complete approach. At Ryan Hospital, the brightest minds from all aspects of cancer care collaborate and offer solutions that are individually tailored for each patient. The team of experts consists of specialists in medical, surgical, and radiation oncology, all working together to provide a comprehensive assessment of each patient's cancer care needs, all in one appointment. And the compassionate, knowledgeable team works with clients every step of the way to navigate through the diagnosis and subsequent treatment plan for their



Nero surrounded by his doctors and nurses. Clockwise from back left: Dr. Michelle Giuffrida, Kim Todd, Dr. Pascale Salah, Dr. Joseph Jacovino, Dr. Lili Duda, and Stephanie Corsi.

beloved companion animals. When clients entrust their animal's care to Penn Vet's Comprehensive Cancer Care team, they in turn commit the very best assessments of treatment options.

NERO'S CASE

Before deciding on a course of treatment, expert veterinary specialists at Ryan Hospital discussed Nero's care. This team included specialists from each of the three major treatment modalities for cancer – medical oncology, surgery, and radiation. Because of this team-based approach, the Lewises avoided the frustrations of having to schedule numerous consultations with different specialists and the stress of sorting through the various treatment options on their own. Instead, the dedicated Comprehensive Cancer Care team reviewed the case, considered various approaches, and offered optimal solutions, resulting in the best quality care for Nero.

Ultimately, Nero's treatment consisted of surgery to remove his tumor followed by radiation therapy. He was diagnosed on July 18 and had surgery on July 23 to remove the tumor in his leg. The size of the tumor did not allow for a complete removal with necessary margins, so as soon as the surgery site had healed, radiation therapy was employed to destroy any remaining cancer cells in his leg. Nero received his first radiation treatment on August 6. He receives daily radiation treatments five days a week, and will complete his therapy after 18



Oncology nurses administer a round of chemotherapy to a feline patient.

treatments. It is important to note that Ryan Hospital is one of few veterinary specialty hospitals capable of offering radiation therapy services to patients on-site. Nero also has benefitted from the combined expertise of specialists in medical oncology, surgical oncology, interventional radiology, and radiation oncology. Following the completion of his radiation treatment in a few weeks, Nero will resume his normal life. “We think the world of Ryan Hospital and the doctors there,” said Nancy Lewis enthusiastically. “We feel fortunate that we live so nearby.”

THE RYAN HOSPITAL DIFFERENCE

In addition to offering comprehensive diagnostics and treatment options, the Ryan Hospital Comprehensive Cancer Care team is also committed to excellent communication and emotional support for owners of pets suffering with cancer. Founded in 2010 and led by Penn Vet’s highly valued grief counselor, Michele Pich, Cleo’s Caregivers Group is a support group aimed at helping those caring for chronically ill, terminally ill, or aging pets. The support group is named in memory of Michele’s loving dog, Cleo, who succumbed to cancer.

Another component to providing the finest cancer care available to pets is Ryan Hospital’s close working relationship with the Veterinary Clinical Investigations Center (VCIC), converging science and medicine, and transferring the latest research directly to the patient. Penn Vet’s VCIC reaches out to veterinary clinics in the Philadelphia metropolitan area to offer patients access to cutting-edge clinical trials. These trials can offer owners potential diagnostic and treatment options that are not available anywhere else locally or even nationally for their pet. The VCIC provides nursing staff that dedicate 100% of their effort to helping owners and their pets navigate the course of enrolling in a clinical trial, offering them state-of-the-art care, while informing science for the benefit of future generations of pets and people alike. For example, Dr. Dottie Brown’s work with a compound derived from the *Coriolus versicolor* mushroom in dogs suffering from hemangiosarcoma resulted in some of the longest survival times ever reported for dogs with the disease, and may be tested next in human clinical trials.

The VCIC is directed by faculty who are trained in clinical epidemiology with an emphasis in clinical trials. The veterinary nurses that staff this center are certified veterinary technicians with training in the management of clinical trials including Good Clinical Practice. Through

the VCIC, the high volume, high quality veterinary care of Ryan Hospital is integrated with the scientific methodology of clinical trials to design, implement, and analyze veterinary clinical studies unlike any other institution.

The Hospital’s proximity to and collaborations with Penn Medicine also continue to yield innovative ways to fight cancer. Dr. Nicola Mason, Assistant Professor of Medicine and Pathobiology, is collaborating with Penn Medicine on a project to further develop cancer immunotherapies that are already showing promise in both canine and human patients. Dr. David Holt, Professor of Surgery, has partnered with Penn Medicine to improve detection of surgical margins at the time of surgery to remove soft tissue sarcomas. He currently offers a surgery using dye and special imaging equipment to Ryan Hospital patients. This technique is vital in both veterinary and human surgical oncology to ensure that the entire tumor is resected. All of these promising therapies may one day offer cancer patients, canine and human alike, a viable alternative or complementary treatment to traditional therapies.

Ryan Hospital clients also have access to some of the finest medical oncologists; a top-notch surgery team, including one of the only fellowship-trained surgical oncologists in the area; a world-class dentistry and oral surgery team, distinguished by their training in maxillofacial cancer surgery; an interventional radiology specialist who performs chemotherapy and non-chemotherapy embolization procedures and installs subcutaneous vascular access ports; and some of the most modern facilities and equipment in veterinary medicine – all in one building. In fact, Ryan Hospital is one of only three veterinary oncology facilities in the country that is able to offer medical, surgical, and radiation oncology specialists in a single service, providing more immediate care and expertise in all aspects of cancer care throughout every step of treatment.

Penn Vet truly is the leader in cancer care in the region and one of only three veterinary comprehensive cancer care centers in the nation. By continuing its fruitful partnerships with Penn Vet’s VCIC and Penn Medicine to make available novel cancer therapies to our patients, the Comprehensive Cancer Care program is in a position to become a forerunner in the field of cancer treatment and research.

The Comprehensive Cancer Care team at Ryan Hospital understands that a cancer diagnosis can be very overwhelming and upsetting for pet owners. The patient’s quality of life is paramount, and our world-class team strives to achieve not only prolongation of life through treatment, but also improvement in quality of life and alleviation of pain. Combined with a rich history of clinical expertise, vibrant research and collaborations, and a culture of compassion, Penn Vet is poised to transform the standards of cancer care. 