

November Marks Pet Cancer Awareness Month

Early detection is key to managing, treating the disease.

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Cat owners should be aware of abnormalities in their pets that could warrant a trip to the vet for a checkup. A monthlong campaign aims to stress the importance of early detection in the fight against pet cancer by educating pet owners about the prevalence and management of the disease in cats and dogs, as well as raising funds for research. National Pet Cancer Awareness Month, first launched in November 2005 by Veterinary Pet Insurance, seeks to empower pet owners so they can make optimal health-care decisions for their pets, said Dr. Carol McConnell, vice president and chief veterinary medical officer for VPI.

“Even though nearly one in four pets will be diagnosed with cancer, few pet owners know how commonly it occurs and what treatment options exist,” she said.

With the development of sophisticated treatments and the willingness of pet owners to pursue those options, cancer is claiming fewer four-legged victims these days, according to the pet health insurer. Knowing the signs of cancer in your pet is key: A growing lump or sore that doesn't heal. Discharge or bleeding from any opening. Weight loss despite normal exercise and activity. Going more than a day or two without eating. Demonstrating an unusually excessive appetite. An overconsumption of water, followed by frequent urination. Difficulty in chewing or swallowing. Any unusually bad smell coming from your pet. Tiring easily and unwillingness to exercise.

In addition, McConnell said routine physical examinations are essential for every pet. “Successful treatment of pet cancer depends on early detection,” she said.

Another way to fight the disease is through supporting cancer research for pets and people. Funds for research will be raised through sales of Pet Cancer Awareness dog collars through the end of November, and a K9K pet-cancer awareness walk for people and their pets, slated for Saturday, Nov. 15, in Long Beach, Calif.