

Cancer Radiation Treatment for Cats

The University of Missouri-Columbia is one of few sites that treat cat and other animal cancers.

Posted: March 23, 2007, 5 a.m. EST

With blue-gray fur and a habit of purring, Percy isn't your typical cancer patient, but at the University of Missouri-Columbia's Veterinary Medical Teaching Hospital, even Russian Blue cats can undergo radiation treatment.

Each year, more than 1,200 appointments are scheduled through the veterinary oncology program at the M.U. College of Veterinary Medicine for cats and other animals suffering from cancer.

Veterinarians with specialty training in oncology examine the animals. The program works in a cooperative effort with human medicine oncologists to find effective treatments for both people and animals.

Veterinarians at M.U. use similar techniques of human medicine, including recent advances in chemotherapy, radiation and surgery.

"The University of Missouri-Columbia is unique in that it is home to a veterinary teaching hospital, a medical school and cancer center, a research reactor and a life sciences research center, all located on the same physical campus," said Carolyn Henry, associate professor and director of the Scott Endowed Program in Veterinary Oncology.

Cats can develop several cancers, such as squamous cell carcinoma, lymphoma, breast and lung cancer.

In addition, the M.U. group has developed an oncology clinical trials service for enrollment of animal cancer patients in trials evaluating new therapies. As evidence of their success in this area, the M.U. oncology program was chosen as one of only 13 sites in the National Cancer Institute's Comparative Oncology Trials Consortium.

Percy, perhaps the most famous pet-patient at the hospital, is owned by Brad Belk, director at the Joplin Museum Complex in Joplin, Mo., who found the cat abandoned in 2000. Belk decided to keep the cat as an official museum greeter.

In the last seven years, Percy has greeted more than 100,000 museum visitors, received fan letters from people all over the world and survived a well-publicized kidnapping.

MU veterinary oncologists were determined not to let cancerous lesions from Percy's abdomen and left hind leg end his star status. Percy was brought to the veterinary teaching hospital after three previous surgeries failed to completely remove his tumors.

To combat his aggressive form of fibrosarcoma, the cat had four weeks of radiation therapy by one of the few linear accelerators dedicated to veterinary use. During his stay at the hospital, Percy received 20 doses of radiation to his tumor site.

Unlike some of the human patients, Percy has shown no signs of side effects from his treatment. Percy was released from the hospital and is doing well, Henry said.