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Collaring canine cancer: Veterinary oncologist is pooch's best friend

By **Jessica Fargen**
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As dog owners dig deeper to prolong their pets' lives with health care once reserved for humans, a Massachusetts veterinary school is joining in the largest effort yet to cure canine cancer, which kills one in four dogs.

Collaring canine cancer

[Canine cancer hits some breeds harder than others](#)

A national cancer tumor tissue bank, modeled after the one for humans, and research funding at 14 veterinary schools, including the Cummings School at Tufts University, are part of the nationwide Cure Canine Cancer campaign, a \$30 million, five-year effort by the Morris Animal Foundation.

Cancer is the No. 1 killer in dogs over age 2, but veterinarian oncology hasn't kept pace with the increasing dedication people have for their pets, said Lisa Barber, an oncologist and professor at Tufts.

"People keep pets until they are geriatric," she said. "Now, it's a 'grandma or grandpa dog . . . we have to take care of them.' There's a lag, in that the demand for these services is greater than the knowledge we have. That is a frustration for oncologists and pet owners."

For Roslindale dog owner Christine Bailey, the news this month that her beloved Akita, Chloe, had bone cancer was "heartbreaking."

"She's my baby," said Bailey, 38.

She never suspected cancer when Chloe's usually wet nose felt like sandpaper, she didn't eat and wouldn't walk. Bailey said that with chemotherapy and the steroid Prednisone, a human drug, Chloe will live another two years. "It's prolonging her life and she won't be in pain. It's helping her. It's killing off the cancer cells," she said.

Michele Turek, Chloe's oncologist at Angell Animal Medical Center in Jamaica Plain, said there's an "explosion of knowledge and interest in veterinary oncology; people are very attached to their pets."

Stephen Withrow, director of the Animal Cancer Center at Colorado State University, said it's time to launch "the biggest organized effort in the history of veterinary medicine to focus attention on scientific research for cancer.

"Pets are as much a part of the family as people are," said Withrow, a veterinarian and adviser to the Cure Canine Cancer effort.

Visit curecaninecancer.org for information.

Jessica Fargen writes the "Making the Rounds" blog for bostonherald.com. She can be contacted at Jfargen@bostonherald.com.



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Dr. Michele Turek attends to Lola in the Radiotherapy Department at Angell Animal Medical Center in Jamaica Plain. (Staff photo by Ted Fitzgerald)

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