



# Researchers seek cancer cure for dogs - and their masters

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Man's best friend may help him find a cure for cancer.

A disturbing combination of factors finds dogs nearly mirroring the cancer rate in humans, says Michael Burke, vice president of the venerable Morris Animal Foundation, a 59-year-old non-profit organization dedicated to animal research.

Man's four-footed pal has an uncanny similarity to humans, especially children, in terms of kinds of cancer and response to cancer treatment.

In addition, the recent mapping of the complete dog genome gives researchers an edge in unlocking what could eventually cure cancer.

Currently, one in four dogs will die from cancer, the leading cause of death for dogs 2 and older, Burke says.

But the breakthrough in genome research and the establishment of the Comparative Oncology Program at the National Cancer Institute allows doctors, veterinarians and researchers to collaborate on treatments and clinical trials.

"There's a crack in the armor of canine cancer that could mean curing cancer for both canines and humans," Burke says.

Golden retrievers are particularly vulnerable, 60 percent of whom die of cancer, according to the Morris Animal Foundation.

Pamela Jones' dog's death 12 years ago from a malignant nasal tumor prompted the Gilbert vet to specialize in radiation oncology. Jones is the only veterinarian who is a board-certified radiation oncologist in the Valley, and there are just 179 nationwide, according to the American College of Veterinary Internal Medicine.

In the 12 years since her dog's death, Jones says there's been little change in treatment. She uses radiation, chemotherapy or a combination of both when treating canine cancer sufferers.

"Raising money (for research) is the only way we're going to get ahead and understand this disease better," she says.

Jones says dogs and cats can respond well to treatment.

"They never go completely bald, and a low percent get sick on chemo," she says. "We use the same drugs on dogs as humans. The radiation treatment is the same."

Organizations such as the Morris Animal Foundation and the Scottsdale-based National Canine Cancer Foundation are relying on people's love of animals to help finance the research to find a cure.

Last month, the Morris foundation launched a \$30 million campaign to find a cure for canine cancer within the next 10 to 20 years. Pfizer Inc. donated \$1.1 million, and the Golden Retriever Foundation added \$500,000.

"People love their animals. They're a part of life and this research isn't an either/or," Burke says.

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