

Osteosarcoma

Osteosarcomas are cancerous tumours found within the bones. They are most commonly found to affect the long bones of large to giant dog breeds. They can present in other large bones such as the skull or pelvis but this is less frequent.

Unfortunately this type of tumour can develop very quickly and the cancerous cells can metastasise (spread) around the body very easily due to the blood flow through the bones, making them malignant (aggressive).

Clinical symptoms can start in the form of lameness on the effected limb and over time a swelling or lump may be felt on the bone accompanied by localised heat and severe discomfort for the animal.

Routine pain killers can be utilised to help but overtime the patient may not feel efficient effect from them. The patient may start to loose their muscle mass in the area surrounding the tumour as they use the limb less than before. On some occasions the tumour may weaken the bone to such an extent that it could break from mild strain like jumping out of a car.

Treating Osteosarcoma:

To treat a cancerous tumour of this kind, it is often recommended if possible to remove it in its entirety. A series of blood tests and imaging will be recommended to assess the patients suitability for this kind of surgery. If proven healthy enough, it can then be discussed whether the patient should have their limb amputated. This ensures that the tumour and surrounding tissues are completely removed, slowing the spread of the cells around the body.

Many dogs are very capable of recovering from this procedure and go on to experience a good quality of life. However for some patients this would not be a suitable option, some may not be able to cope well physically with having to rely upon the remaining limbs to support themselves, so may not be able to cope. A discussion will be necessary with your vet to see if this is in your pet's best interest.

Limb preserving procedures and chemotherapy treatment are sometimes a possibility however the patient would need to be referred to a specialist to undergo this level of procedure.

Prognosis - The goal of treatment is to minimize pain, slow the progression of the cancer and maintain quality of life. If left untreated the prospective survival time is relatively short, some studies have shown approximately 3 months.

If the limb is amputated or bone treated the prognosis is extended to over 6 months with some dogs exceeding 2 years. As previously mentioned, not all treatment options are suitable for all patients so careful consideration and conversations are recommended with a veterinarian to help choose the best course of action for your companion.

Treating metastasis:

As this variety of cancer can be particularly aggressive, it is important to assess and treat areas it may have spread to. It is often recommended for patients to have a CT or radiographs taken of the chest to see if vital organs i.e. lungs/heart/liver contain signs of metastasis. If this is the case, the patient is often managed with palliative care to keep them comfortable and quality of life closely monitored with a vet via regular health checks.

Although it is important for owners to be aware that chemotherapy can be an option, for this type of cancer it is not often recommended.



Image courtesy of RCVS and additional information courtesy of Davies Veterinary Specialist and NDSR.co.uk



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