



ONCOLOGY OUTLOOK

CE Can Improve Recognition of Oral Tumors

By Alice Villalobos, DVM

Many clients don't pay attention to their pet's oral health. Signs that forewarn the problem are often

noticed with mild curiosity and procrastination.

One may brush it off or rationalize the bad breath and awkward chewing as only a minor dental problem because the pet

remains alert and joyful. Sadly, pets often fall into a more advanced stage of cancer before the diagnosis is made.

Clients need to be educated that animals instinctively maintain a normal routine—appearing bright and cheerful despite pain and discomfort while developing oral cancer. Early detection of oral cancer and quick, aggressive action can save a pet's life.

Instruct clients not to smoke in their homes or around their pets and to teach their pets to open their mouths for inspection of teeth, tonsils and the base of their tongues.

Encourage caregivers to brush their pets' teeth daily and to come in for dental cleaning (with or without anesthesia) if the pet's gums are red or if tartar and bad breath are present. Clients can detect oral tumors at their earliest stages if they are routinely inspecting their pets' mouths.

Cats and Smoke

According to a collaborative study conducted by researchers at Tufts University School of Veterinary Medicine and the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, tobacco-related pollutants actually contaminate the fur of household cats. This puts them at risk for oral squamous cell carcinoma and lymphoma.

The study found that if cats live with one smoker, they are almost twice as likely to develop lymphoma but two smokers in the house doubles the risk. Cats are at higher risk for oral cancer because they ingest smoke particles while they groom and inhale.

The study also found that if cats are exposed to five or more years of second-hand smoke, they are more than five times at risk for oral SCC. If they have been exposed to three years, the risk is 3.3 times greater for developing oral cancer.

Cats vs. Dogs

One in four pets referred to our oncology service has oral cancer. It comprises 6 percent of all canine tumors and is the fourth most common feline tumor. Most cats with oral neoplasia have less than a 10 percent survival rate at one year.

Early discovery of an oral tumor is more likely for dogs because they pant and open their mouths often. Oral tumors are discovered late in cats because

they don't pant and they are more aloof.

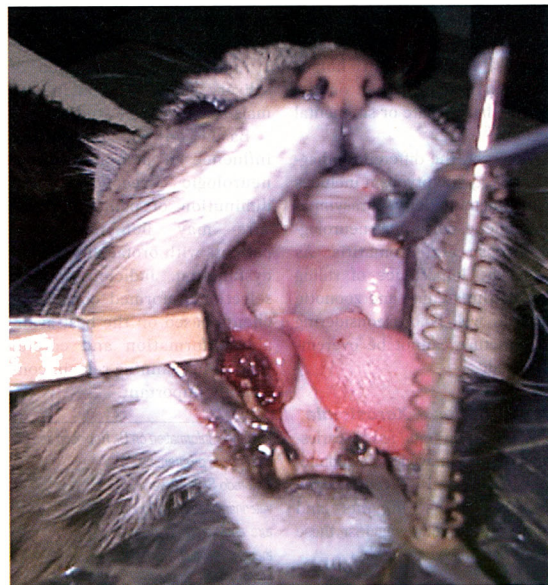
SCC is the most common malignant cell type in humans and cats.

Cats and SCC

The most common sites for

Cats are secretive with their lesions, so cancer is detected when the cat develops difficulty swallowing (dysphagia) or appears disfigured.

Some cats paw violently at their mouth as an early warning sign. They may salivate or bleed



Nicholas is a 19-year-old DSH tabby cat with oral and mandibular SCC.

oral SCC in cats are the mandible, the base of the tongue and the maxilla.

Lingual SCC is biologically aggressive and consistent and consistently fatal within four months.

Affected cats typically present with a history of odor, salivation and difficulty eating. Many cases have a history that included a recent dental procedure during which several teeth were extracted from the suspect tumor site along the upper or lower arcade.

In cats, the early warning signs of oral cancer are often and understandably easily overlooked (even at time of dentistry) because the lesion is often not amass. Instead, this cancer is what I call an "un-cancer."

Rather than being a growth, it is an erosive ulcer that loosens teeth, which causes infection and mimics abscessed tooth roots. I highly recommend a deep-tooth-socket biopsy for cats at the time of extraction, especially if more than one tooth is involved.

Cats often present with large, firm tumors involving the entire base section of the mandible or the maxilla and the hard palate.

and develop halitosis.

As oral tumors enlarge, they often cause the lips to protrude or bulge. They may also push the tongue up, down or over to one side. Lingual lesions make the tongue stiff, painful and useless.

At anesthesia, when we can visualize the full extent of these tumors, we are often amazed that the pet was able to swallow food without gagging or choking.

Our associations are educating the pet-owning public with campaigns to improve dental health. If people learn to recognize the early warning signs of oral cancer and if veterinarians would biopsy more suspicious sites, the diagnosis may be made in time to improve the pet's survival.

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