



## Chelsea Animal Hospital Inc.

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### Alternatively Speaking: A Holistic Look at Treating Cancer Dr. Anne Carroll DVM, CVA

Cancer can be a daunting and very intimidating diagnosis to receive for a loved pet. It comes with a stigma that causes us to go to that worst place, fearing a disease that is impossible to treat. But if we take a moment to put those knee-jerk emotions aside, cancer is just like many other diseases. Modern research is constantly identifying the mechanisms by which specific types of tumors operate in the body, and in doing so uncover their vulnerabilities. This information allows us to develop modern tools to use in the fight against cancer, some of which rely on harnessing the body's own immune system to engage in the battle. Meanwhile, we also have far older tools long used by alternative practitioners. In our hospital, we use Chinese medicine, homeopathic remedies and nutrition to treat the imminent threat of a cancer and attempt to subdue it into a manageable condition while preserving a good quality of life.

Before launching into a discussion on cancer itself, let's back up to before we reach that diagnosis. After all, holistic medicine is as much about prevention as it is about treating illness. When pet guardians and veterinarians team up to promote ideal health in advance that is where we see the most impact on quality and length of our animal's lives. When I am assessing a young healthy animal from a Chinese perspective, I am looking for that animal's weaknesses or areas of imbalance, some call that their 'constitution'. Every medical philosophy I can think of, even Western medicine to a lesser extent, takes the patient's constitution into account when trying to prevent or treat disease. Do they struggle with obesity, get lots of infections that are smelly, and tend to be hyper? Or are they thin, timid, and have a dull dandery coat? Just as their constitutions differ, so will these animal's medical complaints, and when using Chinese medical philosophy the nature of those medical complaints are fairly predictable in advance. Ideally we take this predictive information and use diet, herbs, etc. early on to minimize that basic imbalance, because without intervention the body will take its own measures to function as best as possible in the short term. The issue comes over time when these quick-fix workarounds interfere with the ways the body was ideally designed to operate, and that opens the door for acute, then chronic disease, and in many cases finally a cancer.

So let's say we did not have an opportunity to identify and address imbalances in advance and now our dog or cat has an illness. We use the same assessment technique to treat disease issues when they occur, and that includes cancer. Identifying imbalance is often not as straight forward in this case as in younger pets, since over time the body has made many different attempts to 'fix' things. We are often addressing patterns like layers in an onion, dealing with the current situation and slowly working back to the core issue as we discover it. We can use Elsie Mae as an example. She is a 9 year old Golden Retriever, diagnosed with an aggressive and inoperable thyroid cancer by MRI. The thyroid gland is in charge of the body's metabolic rate, and Elsie's tumor was forcing it into an overactive hyperthyroid condition that is not typical in dogs. She had a fast heart rate, was panting all the time, and unable to settle quietly due to a constant feeling of restlessness. Medications were used to bring her thyroid levels down, but her symptoms were not going away, so her owner wanted to explore any alternative options. When we saw Elsie she was just as described above, by all impressions a hot and slightly restless dog which is not unusual for the types of imbalances we see in her breed. However, her tongue and pulse showed a different story, that Elsie's problem was metaphorically one of stagnant circulation of blood and a lack of that cooling fluid. Her 'heat' in this moment was more a side condition, like a car radiator that overheats when it doesn't have enough coolant. Elsie had already outlived the time her veterinarians had predicted for her and now her quality of life was declining, so we used acupuncture and homeopathy to try to get some immediate relief. Elsie's response was dramatic and rapid. That same evening after her first treatment, her panting and restlessness were gone, and those symptoms did not return for two weeks. This type of symptom management is not always so complete for every patient but most do have some response, enough to give us time to address the pattern of imbalance with slower acting herbs and diet. In Elsie's case we also used aggressive supports known to hamper

cancer cells such as Vitamin A and medical mushrooms to try to slow her cancer's progression and spread. Perhaps more importantly, holistic supports often achieve our primary goal, to make patients like Elsie Mae feel well for whatever time they have left, however long that may be.

Not all cases require an aggressive intervention using so many tools. Some tumors are slow to cause issues and we are not as pressured to do a lot quickly. Take Rudy for example, a 13 year old mixed breed dog who came in for his annual checkup with complaints of being a bit less active than usual. An examination found some enlargement of his abdomen and an xray confirmed a large mass that was taking up enough of his midsection that his intestines were crowded into his lower belly. His person decided that any invasive intervention was not the best choice for Rudy. So Dr Black, our homeopathic practitioner, prescribed a remedy and afterwards Rudy felt better. His energy improved, and over the next year and a half his mass reduced in size as he took nutritional supports and a series of adjusted homeopathic remedies to fit his changing condition. The mass is still there, but is being effectively managed so it does not pose any immediate concern to his well-being, and that is all we ever hope for when dealing with any serious disease.

These cases show a wide difference between how dramatically a cancer can affect the body, and how fast. Just as we mentioned above, that early intervention to manage imbalances is best done before serious disease occurs. It is equally important to seek out alternative therapy as soon as a cancer or any disease is diagnosed. The longer illness is allowed to progress and do damage, the less resources and energy the body has to fight it. Holistic medicine is not magic, it simply uses tools that modern medicine has not researched and developed into mainstream therapy or pharmaceuticals yet. Its methods can modulate circulation and tissue oxygen levels to create improvements that can seem magical in that they exceed conventional expectations, but we still rely on the body's ability to respond and do the work. As such we always recommend starting early, even integrating therapy alongside conventional care. Research has indisputably shown that alternative therapies do not interfere with conventional cancer care, and overwhelmingly they help to improve quality of life. In our experience, they improve response to treatment as well by affecting tumor vulnerability in ways conventional medicine can't harness, and since multi-modal tumor attack is the goal in any oncology protocol, the safe application of alternative therapy can't hurt and often helps enormously. We do treat patients who are receiving conventional care differently, tailoring their program to maximize their Western care and minimize its side effects. Once the patient is stable on their conventional care, new alternative additions are given slowly so as not to overwhelm the patient with too much at once.

Trying to tackle the daunting task of treating cancer is not for everyone, nor every animal, whether using alternative medicine, surgery or chemotherapy. The first step is to get educated since each type of cancer is different. Exploring the details of what each therapy entails, its prognosis and cost is the first step in deciding what is best for your family and pet. Then if you decide that alternative medicine is going to be part of your therapy, embark on early coordinated treatment when possible and give yourselves the best chance for success and don't wait until all western options have been exhausted and your pet is in decline. Unfortunately sometimes a critical condition arises so fast that you find yourself having to make immediate decisions, often without the benefit of past holistic care to give you confidence to try. In these cases follow what your heart tells you is best. Perhaps in the future specialists will include alternative options as front line therapy in acutely critical cases, but for now it is up to the individual to seek out those options when they feel their pet still wants a fighting chance. The same goes for patients that have had a tumor removed, but the expectation is for it to come back. Sometimes chemotherapy or tumor vaccines are options, but keep in mind using alternative medicine addresses the imbalance that allowed that condition to arise in the first place. Doing so may slow its return, and give us more time to relish playing ball or snuggling on the couch with our furry friends.

Dr. Anne Carroll is owner of the Chelsea Animal Hospital where she practices conventional medicine and surgery as well as several alternative modalities including traditional Chinese acupuncture and Chinese herbal medicine. Her associate Dr. Betty Jo Black brings classical homeopathy to the practice. For more information on alternative veterinary medicine visit their website at [www.chelseaanimalhospital.com](http://www.chelseaanimalhospital.com)