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Notes on Lymphoma

- Eighty percent of dogs with lymphoma present with the “multicentric” form – this means that they have superficial lymphadenopathy rather than a discrete or localized form of lymphoma (such as gastrointestinal, mediastinal, or cutaneous). If Thea does in fact have lymphoma, she would have both an extranodal type (her eye) and the multicentric form. I would guess that her lymphoma began in her eye and then metastasized elsewhere since we did not see lymphadenopathy initially.
- Enlarged lymph nodes are not painful. Lymphadenopathy is often localized initially to the submandibular and prescapular nodes.
- Most animals are asymptomatic at the time of presentation but 20-40% will have a history of weight loss, lethargy, anorexia or febrile episodes.
- Prognosis depends largely on the histological grade of the tumor (so we would need to either biopsy or remove one of her affected lymph nodes and send it in for histopathology). I would be willing to remove one of her lymph nodes under mask anesthesia for a significantly reduced price (\$50) and then send the node in to my histopath friend free of charge. Response rates to chemotherapy are better in animals with B-cell tumors and intermediate to high-grade lymphomas. Dogs with low-grade lymphomas can have long survivals without aggressive therapy – however most lymphomas are intermediate to high grade. Unfortunately we can’t grade the tumor with only a fine needle aspirate – we would need a lymph node excision for histopath.
- The clinical signs associated with lymphoma are variable and depend on the extent and location of the tumor. Multicentric lymphoma is the most common and generalized, painless lymphadenopathy is the most consistent finding. The spleen and liver may be enlarged as well. A large array of non-specific signs such as anorexia, weight loss, vomiting, diarrhea, ascites, dyspnea, fever, polydipsia, and polyuria can occur. We are obviously dealing with extranodal lymphoma as well in Thea as evidenced by her ocular bleeding.

- Canine lymphoma can also be associated with paraneoplastic syndromes as well. Anemia is the most common and is usually normochromic, normocytic and nonregenerative (anemia of chronic disease). Hemolytic anemia can also occur (but keep in mind that these paraneoplastic syndromes are rare). One paraneoplastic syndrome that occurs more commonly is with lymphoma is hypercalcemia and can cause many of the same non-specific signs that the cancer itself causes (anorexia, weight loss, muscle weakness, polyuria, polydipsia).
- The books say that without therapy, most dogs with lymphoma will only have several months at most from the time of diagnosis. With chemotherapy, 60-90% of dogs can be induced into complete remission with survival rates of 6-12 months. Dogs undergoing chemotherapy maintain a good quality of life and are usually free of clinical signs of lymphoma if they go into remission.
- Prednisone, given alone at an immunosuppressive dose (2mg/kg) will often result in a short-lived remission of about 1-2 months.
- Side effects of prednisone: weight gain, polyuria/polydipsia (drink a lot and urinate more frequently), polyphagia (eat more/better appetite)