

## **CANINE HAEMANGIOSARCOMA**

Haemangiosarcoma is a malignant tumour that arises from the cells that line blood vessels. The most common sites for this tumour include the spleen and the right atrium of the heart but can also arise in the subcutaneous tissue. German shepherd dogs appear to be at risk of developing this type of tumour in their spleen or heart.

Dogs often collapse following an acute bleed due to rupture of a splenic tumour. This rupture will spread malignant cells around the abdomen. On occasions the splenic mass is found before it ruptures. Surgery is the treatment of choice for the primary tumour. Unfortunately, haemangiosarcoma tends to be a very malignant tumour and most individuals will die from metastatic disease throughout the body. The average survival following surgery alone is less than 3½ months with very few dogs living beyond a year.

The addition of anticancer drugs (principally doxorubicin-based protocols) can improve the survival times. However, 50 per cent of all dogs still die within 7 months. Dogs that have had surgery for an intact splenic mass and where no metastases were detected achieve a slightly better than average survival of 8 months and about a quarter live beyond one year. Dogs in whom the splenic tumour had ruptured tend to do less well (average 6 months) following surgery and anticancer drugs.

The anticancer drug regimen is generally well tolerated but does have potential side effects. These include varying degrees of lethargy, anorexia, vomiting, diarrhoea, and fever. Mild to moderately low white blood counts (neutropenia) occur in up to half of dog cases but usually do not require treatment; however about 10% of dogs can develop severe neutropenia and fever requiring hospitalisation. Severe neutropenia is potentially fatal and even with supportive treatment dogs can die from this.

### **Contact details for the Animal Cancer Trust**

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