

Reader's Forum

My dog recently died after a courageous battle against cancer. Initially, he was treated by a famous veterinarian, who we were told was experienced in such matters. This 'doctor' removed a tumor in my dog's throat, enabling him to eat properly. After the removal of the tumor this man told us that he thought it was benign, although we later found out that one of his junior doctors had done an initial biopsy and thought it was malignant.

The hospital then sent the mass away in two halves for two separate biopsy reports. The information that accompanied the tumor cells clearly stated that lymph nodes were removed. However, when we saw the reply from the laboratories, the initial summary that the hospital sent to the labs was not shown to us. Therefore we did not realize that the cancer had already metastasized to the lymph nodes.

I found another growing mass on my dog, which we later found out again to be lower lymph nodes. This hospital conducted a second operation and removed this mass. There was a mass on the other side of my dog's esophagus as well. If I had not pressurized the 'famous doctor' by getting one of his juniors to explain this, only one mass would have been removed.

I was present in the operating room for the beginning of the operation, luckily. It was at this stage that I began to question, in my mind, the 'doctor's' ability.

We had meanwhile sent pieces of the mass, from the first operation, to an internationally recognized laboratory. After the second operation we received the results from them, which clearly stated that the cancer had already metastasized to the lymph nodes. Oncologists have told us that at this stage, a dog should not be operated on and that radiation and chemotherapy were the only options.

Furthermore, my dog had a parathyroid gland removed during the second operation (which regulates calcium production). We were not informed about this removal and ascertained ourselves that the parathyroid gland had been removed.

It appeared that the junior doctor had no knowledge of this fact when we contacted the hospital and informed them that my dog had started to have attacks (he started to run around the room in a panic -this we later found out was caused by hypocalcemia from calcium deficiency). In fact when we initially told them about the attacks they treated it as if it was a minor thing. Later the same day the attacks turned into seizures (tetany) and we took him back to the hospital.

The hospital then phoned us just before midnight and informed us that he was having a major seizure.

At this point we thought he may die. However after two days he started to regain consciousness, and through his own efforts and self-disciplined struggle, he fought back so that he could walk with his weakened body. It is important to note that the seizures were caused by Hypocalcemia (calcium deficiency) stemming from the removal of the parathyroid gland, and that the hospital was negligent in informing us of this due to their internal lack of professionalism & communication.

We approached the "famous doctor" for an explanation and to our surprise he was totally confused about both operations.

He could not remember what he had removed on the first or second operation and constantly changed his story depending on our line of questioning. He even at one point suggested that another doctor had performed the operation. This other doctor never carries out surgical operations.

After six weeks under the care of this famous hospital, we

finally found a professional oncologist and a hospital that specializes in cancer treatment. This was a great relief and it was comforting to have my dog under such professional care for the last two months of his life.

The reason for writing this article is to warn pet owners not to merely entrust their pet to a veterinarian just because that person has a license. Also, we know this through the aforementioned experience, if you are concerned by the treatment that the veterinarian is giving, you can question his treatment. If he is a good veterinarian he should be able to give you a professional answer. There are many veterinary websites, where professionals can answer your questions so that you can check the validity and accuracy of his answer. I hope that no other pet owners have to go through the experience that we did and that you do not see a particular veterinarian just because he is famous.

We also assumed because this hospital charged exorbitant prices (¥5,000 for two tagamet(antacid) tablets at one point) that it must be one of the best. We could not have been more sadly mistaken.

My dog was very important to me and he deserved the best as he faced his illness with the utmost courage. We finally gave him the best treatment available, but only after six weeks of major problems caused by veterinarians who had very little knowledge of how to treat his illness, but conveyed to us that they had this experience. I hope that none of you have to go through a similar experience with your beloved pets.

Additional points

1. We were not allowed to take the well known hospital's records of my dog's health to the oncologist. They merely provided some very scant photocopies of the note with some x-rays. ...+ photographs from the first operation. The photographs from the second operation were not supplied to us until I told them to get them developed urgently. We were supposed to wait a week for them to be developed before giving them to the oncologist!!

2. The well know hospital kept prescribing drugs (antibiotics) for a cough that my dog had. It turned out that the primary site of the cancer was his tonsil. The hospital had no idea about this and had suggested other primary sites. No search for this primary site was ever made or any staging done. So it turns out that it was probably the primary cancer site making him cough.

3. At no time during the treatment at the well-known hospital, were we offered a referral. I found the oncologist by myself. The 'famous doctor' referred me after I had found the oncologist-the hospital never offered any help in this way. Furthermore, when we asked if there was radiation in Japan, the 'well-known doctor' more or less suggested that there were no facilities available, saying that it was years behind the U.S. The junior doctor backed him up by saying there was no radiation available due to the laws in Japan. He should not have had the second operation as this hospital knew his aggressive cancer (malignant) had already metastasized to the lymph nodes. However, he could have been treated with radiation therapy at that earlier stage. The hospital hid the fact that radiation was available...probably because they wanted me to carry on paying huge bills there. The first bill was ¥1,500,000 approximately.