TUFTS CUMMINGS SCHOOL OF VETERINARY MEDICINE

Your Dog

The Newsletter for Caring Dog Owners

DOG SURVIVED CANCER

Rachel Shapiro of Parker, Colo., has had the rare experience of having two adopted dogs develop hemangiosarcomas. One has since died. Her second dog, Penny, arrived from a rescue program emaciated, with most of her hair gone and a huge growth hanging from her neck.

“After fostering this sweet, wonderful dog for a week, I took Penny in to remove the mass, which was thought to be just fatty tissue,” Shapiro said. “When I went to pick her up after surgery, they showed me the mass, which was filled with blood - hemangiosarcoma.”

Shapiro knew Penny couldn’t be adopted out with the disease and took her to live her last months as a permanent foster. “That was almost a year ago, and I’m happy to say that Penny is currently cancerfree,” she said. “The hemangiosarcoma was the skin type, and no new masses have returned.” Shapiro officially adopted Penny and today the dog shows no signs of slowing down. “She is a bundle of energy and love, who believes people are here just to pay attention to her and rub her belly!”

Julie Claytonhorne and her family adopted Shadow, a Border Collie mix, from the Denver Dumb Friends League in 1996. All was well until two years ago when Shadow had a stand-off with a friend’s pet cat. “Now, this was a dog who loved to chase anything that moved - squirrels and cats being her favorites - so we called her off,” Claytonhorne said. “A few minutes later, we found her stumbling around, looking semiconscious. She vomited, paced the room and couldn’t get comfy. We thought she might have eaten something bad. We had no clue what the problem was.”

The veterinarian listened to Shadow’s heart, took a chest X-ray and recommended a thoracic ultrasound. An echocardiogram confirmed the diagnosis of hemangiosarcoma on the right chamber of her heart. Claytonhorne took Shadow to the oncology department at Colorado State University in Fort Collins. Her pericardium - the sac that encloses the heart - was enlarged because the tumor had bled into it. It had compressed the heart to a degree that it couldn’t function efficiently.

“The stand-off with the cat had raised her excitement level, but her heart could not pump enough oxygen to her brain, hence her odd behavior,” Claytonhorne said. “They told us she might have just a few days left. We were devastated.”

She decided on surgery at CSU to remove Shadow’s tumor and part of the pericardium. Within days, with a 9-inch scar running from shoulder blade to belly, Shadow jumped into the back of Claytonhorneís car, ready to go home. She underwent chemotherapy, but soon an ultrasound showed spots on her spleen. Because of the high probability of another hemangiosarcoma, the spleen was removed.

In February 2004, Shadow seemed unable to keep warm. Even short walks left her shivering. Her gums were pale. “Our veterinarian confirmed that somewhere inside, another tumor was bleeding,” and Shadow had lost so much blood that her body could not maintain its temperature, Claytonhorne said. “We didn’t want to put her through more poking and prodding. We just watched her and loved her.” Throughout the ordeal, Shadow behaved normally, although occasionally specially prepared food was needed to encourage her to eat.

“On Valentine’s Day 2004, Shadow passed away at home with us,” Claytonhorne said, “but not until she had given chase to her squirrel one last time.”