

Feline Nasal Lymphoma

- By Darren Fry

Nasal lymphoma is an important cause of nasopharyngeal disease in the cat and one which can be very satisfying to treat. The clinical presentation can be very similar to other diseases such as chronic rhinitis, nasopharyngeal polyps and nasal cryptococcosis as well as other neoplastic conditions such as nasal adenocarcinoma. Nasal discharge (often unilateral) is a common presenting sign but dyspnoea, epistaxis, stertor, facial deformity, anorexia, epiphora, exophthalmos and sneezing can all be seen.

While the history, clinical presentation and initial imaging studies may be very suspicious for nasal lymphoma, definitive diagnosis requires a tissue biopsy. Biopsies can be taken "blind" or preferably, with rhinoscopic guidance. Nasal flushes rarely yield a diagnosis unless large pieces of tissue are dislodged which can be evaluated histologically.

The clinical signs of feline nasal lymphoma are usually localised to the nasal cavity and there can often be an excellent response to chemotherapy. Nasal lymphoma is generally thought to carry a more favourable prognosis than many other anatomical forms of lymphoma in the cat and may indeed represent the most treatable form of feline lymphoma. However, there have been no large studies to substantiate this. Nasal lymphoma can also be very sensitive to radiotherapy but unfortunately this modality is not yet available for veterinary patients in New Zealand.

A recent prospective study of feline lymphoma by Malik et al shed some interesting light on the condition in Australia. Malik's group evaluated 60 cats treated with a multi-agent chemotherapy protocol. The overall median survival was slightly disappointing at around 4 months. However the 80% of cats that went into rapid complete remission had a median survival of approximately 6 months. Furthermore, nearly 30% of these cats had no evidence of lymphoma 2 years later and were deemed to have been "cured". Interestingly, FIV status had no impact on response to chemotherapy, a finding which gave us encouragement in treating the case presented on the next page. The take home message from the Australian study seemed to be that the major positive prognostic factor for feline lymphoma was a rapid initial response to the first few doses of chemotherapy. Once cats overcame this initial hurdle, then there was a good chance of long term remission or cure. Only a handful of nasal cases were seen in this study and so little further information could be gleaned about this specific manifestation. In addition, we do not know if the Australian data relates to New Zealand cats. However, we strongly encourage the owners of almost all cats diagnosed with lymphoma (especially nasal lymphoma) to embark on a course of chemotherapy. Once a complete remission is achieved, owners are often very keen to persevere when they see the results and realise how well their pet is feeling. If the patient does not respond well to the initial therapy, then an informed decision can be made without having to undergo further unnecessary treatment and expense.

Fortunately, Charlie Gordon, our featured feline, did achieve a rapid complete remission despite being FIV positive and showing quite severe presenting signs. At the time of writing, he is back to his normal self and we hope, heading for a long term remission or dare we say, even a cure.



Charlie Gordon

