

# Boxer gets chemotherapy

By Elaine Storey

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His name is Tigger and his droopy jaw-line and copious slobber are just two of his many endearing traits. He greets strangers with a complete body wag - saving the hugs for his closest friends like the staff at Nechako Valley Animal Health Services where he is undergoing chemotherapy treatments.

Tigger is a 12-year-old Boxer with lymphoma. He completed his 17th round of chemotherapy on Wednesday June 5, and did so without a wimper. Dr. Stephen, Tigger's veterinarian, has worked at the center for three years.

"When we saw Tigger in the fall of 2007, he had golf ball size lumps on his throat and in every joint. He had a good appetite, but was losing weight. We did blood work, lab tests and took a sample of one of the lumps," said Dr. Stephen. "When the results came back, we sat the family down and told them the brutal truth. Tigger had Stage 3-B lymphoma and would die without treatment."

To have Stage 3, every lymph node must be affected, plus there must be clinical signs of the disease.

"Tigger was more tired than normal and had all these swollen lumps on his neck and legs," said owners Lynn and daughter Kimberly Russell. "He ate normally, but was losing hair and he slept - more than normal."

Russell's adopted Tigger as a seven-year-old. They had owned Boxers in the past and gladly adopted him when he was given up by an area family. Two years ago, they bought a female - Cookie - as a companion for Tigger. At night, the inseparable pair share a huge blanket on the floor in the living room.

On the day of his 17th appointment Tigger marked his favourite rock in the garden (twice) before making his way into the waiting room. Once there he was a mix of "Curious George" and "Friendly Greeter." Everyone through the door got a droopy-eyed nod and a series of wet sniffs. Tigger was at home - hangin' out, just waiting for his turn to pass through the treatment door.

Inside the treatment room, Tigger was on familiar ground. He knew the routine, and in the hands of Assistant Kimi, he stepped on the scales and waited once, and then again just to confirm. He stood beside the examination table and relaxed so Kimi could hoist his 33.7 kgs onto the table. He thanked her with several saliva applications to her cheek and a big paw around her neck.



With Dr. Stephen's soothing sing song partnered with affectionate patting from Kimi, Tigger was the model of acceptance.

He readily offered up his right leg for cleaning and shaving, and only demonstrated slight inquisitive behaviour when new vet Dr. McIlwain came through a side door.

Tigger's chemotherapy treatment is bright red and is administered into a vein in his front leg. "Today's treatment is called Doxorubicin," said Dr. Stephen. "The pharmacist at the hospital makes the dosage and every precaution is taken when it's administered. It's called Red Death, and if it goes outside the cardiovascular veins, it would mean amputation," said Dr. Stephen acknowledging the red vial. Tigger licks whatever part of Kimi's arms he can reach while the docs don surgical booties, gowns, masks and gloves.

From the waiting room, the sound of a whining dog makes owners Lynne and Kimberly nervous. "That isn't Tigger, he has a girly whine," they nod, laugh and continue their wait.

Tigger's 'Red Death' is administered without incident, and his slightly shorn leg and a happy face band aid are all that remain at his injection site.

"We like to keep him here for another twenty minutes or half hour," says Dr. Stephen. "We administer anti-nausea drugs and send him home with meds if needed."

Tigger hasn't needed extra meds and right from the start he has been an 'excellent patient.' "Chemotherapy is different in animals," says Dr. Stephen. In people chemotherapy is used to cure the disease, in animals "We want them to go into remission. It will give him a mean survival rate of thirteen more months."

"If any animal deserves this extra time – it's Tigger," she says with a nod, shinning up his already sleek fur.

"He's done very, very well. "Tigger is on his feet soon after the treatment, waiting while clinic staff dispense with all the medical trappings.

It's almost a given - when Kimberly confesses that Tigger "loves white bread with butter," that he'll probably get his fair share once he gets home.

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