



## VETERINARY ONCOLOGY CONSULTANTS

Helping veterinarians treat pets with cancer

### **Information for Caregivers of Puppy Thomas**

#### **Actinomycin-D**

All anticancer drugs have the potential to produce adverse side effects. However, the side effects that can occur in pets are usually not as severe as those in humans due to the lower doses used. It is important to know what the possible side effects of each drug are so that you will know what to expect. As the caregiver, you have an important role in recognizing the side effects, managing them at home whenever possible, and alerting your veterinarian if the side effects persist.

Actinomycin-D is a liquid which is given slowly into a vein. Actinomycin-D has the possibility of causing serious side effects. However, as with any chemotherapy, not every animal will develop these side effects.

#### **SIDE EFFECTS THAT MAY OCCUR:**

1. Nausea, loss of appetite (anorexia).
2. Vomiting and diarrhoea - This may occur 2-5 days after the treatment.
3. Low white blood cell count – The neutrophil count will drop below normal 5-7 days after the drug is given, but will usually return to normal by the 8th or 9th day. This should not cause a problem unless the cell count drops too low, and the body cannot fight off infections causing your pet to get sick. If this happens, his/her symptoms may include a fever, vomiting, diarrhoea and anorexia.
4. Skin damage at the injection site - This may occur if any of the drug leaks outside of the vein. Signs will include swelling, redness and/or an open sore. Also, your pet may lick at the leg more than usual.
5. Lethargy.

## **HOW TO MANAGE SIDE EFFECTS**

### **Vomiting**

1. Take your pet's temperature. Call the hospital if greater than 39.4°C.
2. Withhold food and water for 12 hours, then offer your pet small amounts of water.
3. If your pet does not vomit after drinking water, offer bland food such as boiled chicken and rice or chicken baby food. Gradually return to normal diet.
4. Call the hospital if vomiting is severe, accompanied by a fever or persists longer than 24 hours.

### **Diarrhoea**

1. Withhold food for 12 hours. Water is OK.
2. Offer bland, easily digestible foods such as boiled chicken and rice. Gradually reintroduce normal diet.
3. Call the hospital if diarrhoea persists for more than 48 hours or if your pet has a fever of greater than 39.4°C.

### **Anorexia**

1. Take temperature. Call the hospital if the temperature is greater than 39.4°C.
2. Offer your pet enticing foods such as chicken, ham and tuna fish. Try warming the food.
3. Call the hospital if the anorexia persists for more than 48 hours.

### **Lethargy**

1. Allow your pet to rest as much as he/she wants. His/her energy level should return to normal within a couple of days.

### **Skin Damage**

1. Keep your pet from licking the area. You may need to wrap the leg or apply an E (Elizabethan) collar.

### **Low White Blood Cell Count**

1. Infections caused from having a low white blood cell count are potentially the most severe side effect of chemotherapy. Infections are most likely to occur 5-7 days after a drug is given.
2. If your pet shows symptoms of infection 5-7 days after the treatment, take your pet's temperature. (Normal is 37.8°-39.2°C). If the temperature is greater than 39.4°C, or if you cannot take the temperature, you should call the hospital immediately. A fever with a low white blood cell count is an emergency, and your pet may need to be admitted to the hospital and receive intravenous fluids and antibiotics.