

In September of 2002 we noticed a couple lumps under Puppy's chin. I knew immediately what it was. I took him to the vet the very next day. We were referred to the Veterinary Cancer Referral Group (VCRG) in Los Angeles, CA. There we saw Dr. Sue Downing. We began chemotherapy on Puppy. He did not do very well with a couple of the drugs and we had to change the protocol a time or 2 in order to find something he would tolerate.

When doing chemotherapy it is very important to continually check the white blood cell count (WBC) each time you give the drugs. The WBC are the way the body fights infection, and if the count gets too low the animal will get very sick. It is standard protocol when giving chemo to check the WBC **BEFORE** giving the drugs. If the count is too low & you give the drugs anyway the animal can die. That is what happened to Puppy. It was the protocol at VCRG to give the drugs first, then check the blood. Their reasoning for this was that they would then only have to "stick the dog" once, as opposed to twice. One time for the blood, and another for the drugs. If they found the count was too low they would then administer something called Neupogen, which is supposed to increase the WBC. However, that is another cost to the owner, as well as a risk to the animal.

The day we euthanized Puppy was not actually the day he died. He died the day they gave him his last chemo treatment. After that treatment there was nothing they could have done to save him. They gave him his regular treatment, then took the blood as usual to check. However, their blood machine wasn't working that day so they sent me home saying he'd be fine and they'd let me know the blood results the next day. Within 3 hours he was in the emergency clinic. He spent the weekend there. I never got a call from VCRG about his bloodwork. They never called to say that if he wasn't already in the hospital I should get him there ASAP. Normal WBC is 4.0 – 15.5. His WBC count was at 0.3 at the time they gave him the chemo. It dropped after that because his body had nothing to help him fight it. I later found out from his medical records that the treatment before this one his WBC was at 3.4, which had dropped from 16.1 the time before. Yet they still did the treatment and said nothing.

Puppy suffered a horrible death. He should not have had to endure such pain. I filed a complaint against Dr. Sue Downing with the Veterinary Medical Board shortly after Puppy's death. I had read on the Internet how difficult it is to have a veterinarian found guilty or negligent, so I almost didn't file. But for Puppy's sake I had to do it. And I am happy to report that it has taken over 18 months, but they cited Dr. Sue Downing and found her in Violation of Business and Professions Code, Section 4883 (i) – **Negligence**. She was ordered to take such measures as are necessary to practice at an acceptable standard of care.

If your pet needs chemotherapy, please, please, please insist they perform the blood panel first. Find a reputable oncologist who does things right. Your pet's life depends on it and he/she is counting on you.

Laura Bourhenne