

Hey Neighbor



For The Love Of Horses

By Frank J. Buchman

Cancer isn't typical ailment in horses

While not a major concern, cancer can develop in horses, just like with humans.

"Cancer can be a problem in horses, but the occurrences are much lower than other ailments like colic, diseases and lacerations," said Dr. Laurie Beard, K-State associate professor in equine veterinary medicine.

"There are several kinds of cancer in horses, and most of them are benign, but some are malignant," continued Beard, who has been at KSU for a year and a half after many years on the faculty at the Ohio State University.

Most common equine cancer is a benign sarcoid, according to Beard. Various methods of treatment including injections, ointments and surgical removal have proven successful cures. In-depth discussion of sarcoids was featured in the October 11 For The Love Of Horses column.

Melanoma is the second



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most common cancer in horses, and unlike in humans, it is not malignant. "Melanoma is a benign cancer in horses," Beard said.

Although all horses can get melanoma, 80 percent of gray horses will develop melanoma cancer at some time in their life.

"We do not really know the cause of melanoma, but it probably has something to do with gray horses having a large amount of melanin, a black pigment, in their skin," she said.

Melanoma cancer appears as a hard, round black mass ranging from the size of a BB to that of a golf ball. "It can occur anywhere on a horse, but melanomas typically show up in the genitalia and under the tail," Beard related.

The majority of melanoma cancers are not treated. "There is usually not enough skin to close the opening when a melanoma is removed on the underneath side of the tail," Beard pointed out.

If owners feel the need for removal of melanomas for personal reasons or for aesthetic value, Beard shared that surgical removal is an uncomplicated procedure to satisfactorily take care of the situation.

An anti-ulcer drug, commercially available as Tagament, will slow the growth of some melanomas.

Squamous cell carcinoma is the most common malignant cancer in horses, according to Beard. "It typically shows up in the eyes and genitalia," she noted.

"More prevalent in blue-eyed and light-skinned horses, squamous carcinoma occurs in less than 10 percent of all horses," Beard continued. "It is the same type of cancer that is common in

the eyes of cattle."

Treatment and cure are most successful with early identification. "The cancers can be surgically removed and then followed with topical agents," the veterinarian explained.

Continuous chemical treatments can sometimes cure the cancer, and radiation has also been used successfully as a cure in some situations, Beard added.

Even though it occurs in less than 5 percent of all horses, lymphosarcoma is a highly deadly cancer that can appear anywhere in horses with the throat, chest and abdomen being common locations.

"Identification of lymphosarcoma usually requires lots of diagnostic work," Beard insisted. "The horse will probably get thin and start looking quite unhealthy."

Treatment is often "very unrewarding," and lymphosarcoma is fatal in many cases, Beard warned. If lymphosarcoma appears on the skin of a horse, there is a "better prognosis," with treatments sometimes curing the ailment.

Granulosa cell tumors can appear in the ovary of a mare. "She will have a change of behavior, often with a stallion-like behavior," Beard described.

This cancer in mares is diagnosed by an ultrasound and can usually be surgically removed. "Mares will then typically be breeding sound. Actually mares can successfully raise foals with only one ovary," Beard said.

Cancer Not Typical Ailment In Horses

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"Cancer can be a problem in horses, but the occurrences are much lower than other ailments like colic, diseases and lacerations," evaluated Dr. Laurie Beard, K-State associate professor in equine veterinary medicine.

"There are several kinds of cancer in horses, and most of them are benign, but some are malignant," continued Beard, who has been at KSU for a year and a half after many years on the Ohio State faculty.

Most common equine cancer is a benign sarcoid, according to Beard. Various methods of treatment including injections, ointments and surgical removal have proven successful cures, she related. Indepth discussion of sarcoids was featured in the October 11, For The Love Of Horses column.

Melanoma is the second most common cancer in horses, and unlike in humans, it is not malignant. "Melanoma is a benign cancer in horses," Beard verified.

Although all horses can get melanoma, 80 percent of gray horses will develop melanoma cancer at some time in their life, Beard indicated.

"We do not really know the cause of melanoma, but it probably has something to do with gray horses having a large amount of melanin, a black pigment, in their skin," she commented.

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