

Tommy's Treatment Plan

The Cost of Melanoma...

Tommy's medical bills totaled over \$11,000. But it's not all about the cost for treatment, it's about treatment to give him the best quality of life possible. Yes, it is expensive, but love has no price tag attached. Pets are family and deserve medical care as good as we get.

- All of Tommy's cancer treatments and follow-up exams were performed at the Cornell University Hospital for Animals in Ithaca, New York.

Tommy's prognosis...

Canine patients with advanced disease (stage II, III or IV) report a median survival time of 1 to 5 months with standardized therapies.

Since Tommy was receiving a palliative protocol, it is unlikely he would experience acute side effects.

If his tumor does have great response to the radiation protocol it is possible he would develop an oral nasal fistula (a hole between his mouth and nose putting him at risk for aspiration pneumonia).

Late side effects: Bone necrosis (part of the normal bone dies) and a different tumor grows within the radiation field. The risk of these side effects are very small & occur 3 to 5 yrs. after radiation therapy is completed.

Tommy's risk for bone necrosis and a new tumor developing is greater with the high palliative protocol dose if he has a great response and lives many years.

Unfortunately, the goal is to alleviate his discomfort and potentially stabilize the disease for 3 to 6 months.

We Prayed.

Tommy's Treatments...

- Tommy received external beam radiation therapy using 6 MV photons in parallel opposed fields to the primary tumor and regional lymph nodes (2 sites) for 8 Gy/fraction for 4 weekly fractions for a total dose of 32 Gy.
- Tumor was measured and photographed. He also received a left maxillary nerve block during treatment #3.
- Tom received 4 bi-weekly melanoma vaccine injections in the muscle of his rear leg and received a booster vaccination every 6 months.
- I monitored Tommy for any signs of disease progression or systematic illness, such as pain, loss of appetite, lethargy, vomiting or diarrhea. I made a chart to keep daily records. He shows no signs or symptoms of disease progression until his last week.

Doctor and Hospital Visits...

12/6/10

Initial biopsy at primary care Veterinarian.

12/20/10

Surgical consultation, CBC, chemistry panel, urinalysis, EKG, chest radiographs (2 views) sedated oral exam, lymph node aspiration at OPVMC in Orchard Park, NY.

1/3/11

Oncology consultation, physical exam, chest radiographs at Cornell University Hospital for Animals.

1/5/11

Histopathology slide review

1/28/11

Second Oncology consultation, physical exam in Rochester, NY.

The remainder of Tommy's treatments were at the Cornell University Hospital for Animals, except an occasional visit to his primary Veterinarian.

2/3/11

CT scan w/radiation treatment plan, chest radiographs, CBC & chemistry panel, lymph node aspiration, oral exam, sedation, melanoma vaccine injection #1, Tramadol 50mg, Clindamycin 150mg.

2/8/11 to 3/1/11

Radiation treatments once weekly for 4 weeks, melanoma vaccine injections # 2 & #3, pain management, Clindamycin 150mg (2 refills)

3/15/11

Radiation recheck, sedated oral exam, melanoma vaccine injection #4

4/4/11

Sedated oral exam, thoracic radiographs

5/3/11

Level 2 exam (brief 30 min. exam)

6/7/11

Level 2 exam

8/1/11

Thoracic radiograms & melanoma vaccine booster, abdominal ultrasound

9/26/11

Sedated oral exam & checkup

12/5/11

Thoracic radiograms and exam, Clindamycin 150mg. (14 days).

1/10/12

Two week check-up at primary care Veterinarian to evaluate infection, Clindamycin 150 mg for 2 more weeks.

1/30/12

Thoracic radiograms, exam & melanoma vaccine booster.

2/20/12

CT scan w/radiation treatment plan. Tommy was to receive quad shot palliative radiation on

2/21 & 2/22. Prescriptions of Clavamox 125mg for infection and Pregabalin 15mg for pain.

2/21/12

Tommy receives infusions of lidocaine/ketamine and Pamidronate, which will last for 2 weeks.

3/6/12

Tommy returns to Cornell for an exam and his final infusion.

Tommy Updates...

I kept detailed records of all Tommy's treatments. Here are details of his hospital visits.

6/7/11 - Today at Tommy's exam I was told his tumor shrunk slightly since his last visit.

7/28/11 - We are preparing for Tommy's appointment at Cornell on August 1st. He will have thoracic radiographs and receive his 6 month melanoma vaccine booster. We pray his chest is still clear and the cancer has not spread.

8/2/11 - Yesterday was a very stressful day. Tommy received his 6 month melanoma vaccine booster and thoracic x-rays. I was told his chest was clear. Thank God! Unfortunately, the tumor did not shrink or grow - it is stable. His abdomen was tense and he would not allow the doctor to touch him. After speaking to me, she ordered an abdominal ultrasound. We were not scheduled, so I was told it may be a long wait, any time up until 5 pm or we could come back tomorrow. We were already there and it's a 3-1/2 hr. drive, so we waited. His ultrasound was fine, but after reading the discharge papers I have questions for the doctor. I must contact her.

9/26/11 - Tommy's sedated oral exam revealed the tumor has not shrunk nor has it grown. I'm told that is good. But will it ever shrink? I thought it would by now. The mass measures approximately 2.8x1.9x2.8 cm and was photographed to document the appearance of the lesion. All vital parameters were in normal limits. I still must check for disease progression or systemic illness, such as pain, loss of appetite, lethargy, vomiting or diarrhea. Tommy sure loves to eat, play, and go for rides. So far, no signs of progression. I'll still worry until the next exam.

12/5/11 - Tommy's chest is still clear and lymph nodes are normal. He does have an infection at the start of the tumor sight and loose teeth. Tumor is stable. He receives Clindamycin for 2 weeks then he will be re-evaluated at his primary vet.

1/30/12 - Tommy's chest is still clear and lymph nodes are still normal. The melanoma vaccine does work, keeping the cancer from spreading. He still has the infection in his mouth and a culture is taken. He receives Clavamox for 2 weeks. The bad news...his tumor has grown 50% in one direction (front to back) and 30% in the other direction.

2/20/12 - Tommy arrives at Cornell 7:30 am for his CT scan. It was a really long drive leaving home at 3:30 am. After his CT scan and exam, Tommy was wheeled out on a table, sitting up. He was too weak to walk out on his own. That scared me. I am told his tumor grew another 30% and now measures 6.7cm (CrCd)x4.8cm(ML)x2.7cm(DV) which includes the thickened portion of the middle upper lip. The tumor is now in the soft palate. The radiation may dry up the tumor, but may cause a large hole in his mouth. We leave the hospital uncertain what to do and head to the hotel. I called my husband and we decided not to continue with the radiation. I called Dr. Rizzo with the decision. She told me about the infusions he can receive to alleviate the pain & bone loss. The infusions would last for 2 weeks. We decide it's a go and will be back at the hospital at 8 am. It will take all day because the infusions are given slowly so they last longer. I had to flush Tommy's catheter, which he did not like and it seemed very uncomfortable. None of us got much sleep that night.

2/21/12 - Upon arrival at the hospital Dr. Rizzo asked me if I'd like to see Tommy's CT scan results. Of course I did. It showed the tumor was penetrating the bone. It was also suggested Tommy be put down soon. I cried, wouldn't you? Tommy & his new Doctor chat on his way to get his infusions. They must have had a lot to talk about, since they're both from Philadelphia, PA. It was a long day for me and for Caileigh, who tagged along again for moral support. She's such a wonderful girl! While in the waiting room, I was approached by the Professor of Internal Medicine and discussed Caileigh's elevated liver enzymes. The Professor planned to contact Caileigh's primary Veterinarian for a discussion. Tommy's infusions lasted all day. It was close to 5:30 pm when he was discharged and we headed home. We should have spent the night in Ithaca. It was a terribly long drive home.

3/6/12 - Tommy and I head back to Cornell for another set of pain medication infusions. At least he would be comfortable for a couple more weeks. Caileigh stayed home this time - it was just me and my little guy. He wore his Cornell Animal Hospital bandanna. When his infusions were finished, he walked out through the hospital doors with his doctor. Tommy was wearing a MLB Phillies bandanna which Dr. Rizzo bought for him when she was back home. How wonderful was that? We took photos before leaving the hospital. This would be Tom's last visit.

3/17/12 - Tommy takes his last ride. We knew it was time. Last night Tommy snorted blood out of his nose. I couldn't sleep and neither could he. The cancer had control of Tommy. He seemed happy going for a ride, looking out the window, but deep down I believe he knew where he was going. Tommy's Vet Dr. Bache was very gentle, putting him first into a state of sleep, then administering his final injection. Tommy crossed the rainbow bridge on St. Patrick's Day. We took Tommy home to rest in peace at the place he loved most - our home, his home. It was the most difficult day of my life and the most difficult part of this website to write. Tommy will be remembered forever in so many ways by so many people. We will love you forever Tommy. You are now whole again. See you in heaven!