

Evaluation of dog owners perceptions concerning radiation therapy

Since year 2006 radiation therapy (RT) is available for small animals in Sweden. The primary aim of this study was to obtain information on initial owner experiences and perceptions after their dog was subjected to RT.

Another aim was to investigate attitudes to RT of a group of Swedish veterinarians, taking into account their level of knowledge of oncology and RT.

Methods: All owners of dogs (n=23) who had undergone RT for malignancy at JAPnKAPping Small Animal Hospital from March 2006 to September 2007 were interviewed. A questionnaire was handed out to a selected group of veterinarians.

Results: All 23 owners responded.

All owners thought that their dog was doing fine during RT and most that their dog was also fine during the following phase when acute RT related skin reactions occur and heal. Three owners stated that their dog had pain that negatively impacted quality of life during the culmination of the radiation dermatitis.

Five owners reported that RT positively impacted quality of life of the dog during the first weeks after RT since palliation was achieved by RT. The owners were not disturbed by their own efforts.

All but one owner stated that they would make the same decision about RT again if a similar situation occurred. The most important factor for this decision was the chance to delay occurrence of tumor related discomfort.

The chance for cure was of less importance but still essential followed by expected side effects. Time and travel, number of treatments required and financial cost all had low impact.

The veterinary pilot survey showed that stated low background knowledge of small animal oncology/RT was associated with negative expectations of RT for small animals.

Conclusions: The results show that from these owners perspective, RT is a worthwhile treatment modality and that the nuisance for the dog seems manageable and well motivated in accordance to the gain.

The authors' interpretation of the findings from the veterinary survey is that there is a need for more information of small animal RT in Sweden, in order to provide evidence-based treatment recommendations to clients.

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