



MELANOMA THERAPY

1 11:30 a.m., October 5, 2007

Winnie is wise to what's about to happen as he obediently lies down on a foam pad in the Western College of Veterinary Medicine's pet radiation therapy centre (*photo 2*).

The nine-year-old standard poodle is there to receive a dose — his second in four weeks — of a new therapeutic vaccine for canine melanoma. Dr. Valerie MacDonald, a veterinary medical oncologist (*centre, photo 1*) at the veterinary college, is getting some help from clinical associate Dr. Candace Grier (*left, photo 1*) before administering Winnie's dose.

Nine months earlier, Winnie was diagnosed with oral melanoma (stage 1) after a cancerous mass was removed from the roof of his mouth. When Regina veterinarian Dr. Rosemary Ward (*right, photo 1*) found the mass in her dog's mouth, she immediately understood

the seriousness of the situation. Canine melanoma is an aggressive and deadly form of cancer that often appears in dogs' mouths, nail beds or foot pads.

After learning about the therapeutic canine melanoma vaccine, Ward contacted MacDonald to find out more details. A board-certified specialist in veterinary medical oncology, MacDonald is qualified to have access to the new vaccine.

Developed through a partnership between Merial, Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, and the Animal Medical Center of New York, the vaccine's use is limited to veterinary medical oncologists and is designed to work in conjunction with surgery, radiation or chemotherapy.

Since clinical studies have shown that the vaccine is effective in increasing the life span of dogs diagnosed with canine melanoma, Ward decided to try the therapy on Winnie. Her dog will receive a total of four doses of the vaccine over eight weeks, followed by a booster every six months.

For MacDonald, she welcomes the chance to provide one of her patients with cutting-edge cancer therapy. This is the first time that the U.S. Department of Agriculture has approved a therapeutic vaccine for the treatment of cancer in either animals or humans. The canine melanoma vaccine received conditional approval from the USDA in 2007.

After Grier loads the vaccine into a carbon dioxide-powered delivery device, MacDonald injects the vaccine into the muscle of Winnie's right hind leg (*photo 4*).

In seconds, the painless treatment is done without anesthesia or sedation. As soon as he can, Winnie jumps to his feet, gives himself a good shake and wags his tail. Time to go home (*photo 5*). **V**

For more information about WCVM's veterinary medical oncology service, contact Dr. Valerie MacDonald:

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Photos: Michael Raine



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