



A Holistic Vet's Care for his Wolfhound's Bone Cancer

by Dr. Jason Rowan

Our wee bundle of Wolfhound joy came into our family on a crisp winter day, three years ago. My wife drove across several mountain ranges to deliver a soft, floppy 26 lb baby into my arms. In Gaelic, Tulleigh means gentle, and we immediately fell in love with Tully, a pleasing, pleasant pup who lives up to his name.

I've been a veterinarian for seventeen years, so I know all the health challenges a giant dog faces. From puppyhood, we did everything we could to set the odds for Tully: growing him slowly, feeding him a balanced raw diet, giving him a vasectomy at fourteen months. But sometimes fate just has other plans. One evening when he was two years old, Tully gave a yelp, ran over and sat on my wife's lap, and looked back at his leg.

Bone cancer immediately flashed through my mind, but since Tully was so young, we explored other avenues first. A week went by without incident, but then Tully started to cry out randomly, crawling into our laps and looking scared. This pain meant it wasn't a neurological problem as I had originally guessed, and the much more serious possibility had my wife and I scared too. I've treated many patients with bone cancer, but we just weren't expecting it in such a young dog. We immediately X-rayed Tully's hind leg, had a look, and sent the X-rays to a radiologist and to another colleague who does orthopedics. The results were inconclusive: if Tully had bone cancer, it was so very early that it was impossible for any of us to label.

This meant we had to wait two excruciating weeks before we could do the X-rays again. In the meanwhile, I started Tully on a cancer-starving diet and anti-cancer herbs. My wife already makes his food, so this meant switching out the fruits for shiitake mushrooms and more cruciferous vegetables, adding Traditional Chinese herbs to boost his immune system and changing the carb/protein ratio to starve the cancer of starches. In those two difficult weeks before the next X-ray; we waited, researched our options, and didn't sleep much, meanwhile controlling his increasing pain.

After two weeks, we repeated the X-rays. It was very subtle, but it was there... some bubbles on the bone. The radiologist confirmed - super early, but very rapidly growing bone cancer. Even though we knew we were heading down

that road, we were devastated. Our sweet baby boy had a terminal diagnosis, and he wasn't even three years old.

Bone cancer like Tully's has a terminal diagnosis... and it's fast. Most of the time, untreated patients have only a month or two to live, before the pain gets unbearable. Once you see the bones change, it's also almost always metastasizing to the lungs. Speed is of the essence in treating bone cancer and we made some fast decisions.

I should pause my story to share that my wife and I own our own integrative veterinary hospital in Kelowna, BC. Our clients call us holistic, because I practice Traditional Chinese herbal medicine, acupuncture, and nutritional therapies; however, we actually are integrative because we offer the best of conventional therapies and alternative medicine. Faced with Tully's diagnosis, we chose an aggressive, optimistic integrative route including curative-intent radiation, chemo, Chinese herbs and food therapy.

Back to the time of official diagnosis: Tully was already on Tramadol and Meloxicam, a narcotic and an NSAID to control his pain. Even with those, he was lifting his leg, and occasionally crying out. We had to act quickly and aggressively. We seriously considered amputating his leg, which is the typical approach. However, we just couldn't see

our boy, who is a muscular 170 lb and 37" at the shoulder, having a good quality of life post-amputation. So we chose a less conventional treatment plan.

My wife loaded Tully into the station wagon and drove back across those same mountains to Calgary, for Tully to get Rapid-Arc radiation therapy at the [Western Veterinary Specialist and Emergency Centre](#).

First, the specialists took a CT, made digital measurements of Tully's leg and the extent of his

cancer and programmed the radiation machine. A week later Tully made the trip out to Calgary again for three days of curative-intent Rapid-Arc radiation therapy on his femur. This type of radiation therapy is new to Canada... it's only



been available in Calgary for two years, and the University of Saskatchewan just got a machine last summer. In contrast to the more common palliative care radiation, this radiation is delivered in 3D, specifically targeting the tumour site and delivering higher power radiation in three treatments over three days. There are more experienced hospitals in the United States that have reported similar survival times to amputation, and we gambled it was worth the trips and financial investment.

Thankfully, the Rapid-Arc radiation therapy paid off. Within a week, Tully was back on his leg and off the pain medications all together. We did X-ray his leg a couple of months later, and as expected, Tully had a big hollow in the bottom of his femur where the tumour used to be.

The downside of the radiation is that it leaves the leg very fragile. So immediately after returning from the radiation, we started Tully on Traditional Chinese herbs to support bone density and bone health. Two weeks later, we started him on monthly IV infusions of a bone density drug called Pamidronate. This monthly IV drip is the bane of Tully's existence, as it takes two hours and hurts when going in. But we've found that it makes a huge difference in his pain control, and is worth the short term discomfort for the benefit it gives all month.

Treating bone cancer is about pain control, and secondarily, about controlling metastases growing in the lungs. Thankfully, Tully didn't have any metastases detectable by the CT scan when he received his radiation therapy, so we were able to start a chemotherapy regime to fight them off shortly after the radiation. As much as he is bothered by the Pamidronate drip, Tully really doesn't mind the 15 minute Carboplatin chemo treatment every three weeks. He hasn't had any side effects from it either. The only person really effected by the chemo is my wife, who has to cook his food now that Tully is on chemotherapy. She calls it her labour of love, cooking 30 meat loaves one day each month, to mix in with the other components of his balanced, cancer starving diet. She's looking forward to next month when he's done his six treatments and Tully can eat his meat raw again.

During these treatments, we've had to be very careful with Tully, as his leg bone is exceedingly porous and prone to breaking. He's had lots of neighbourhood walks but very little off-leash time in the last six months. This is probably Tully's biggest source of consternation... he feels like a million bucks, and doesn't understand why he can't run through the forest like he used to. But he does enjoy hours sitting in the neighbourhood cafe, visiting with clients at our clinic, and regular Wolfhound pursuits such as counter-surfing, laying on the sofa and sitting on laps.

This week we passed the six-month mark since Tully's diagnosis. It's been an emotional roller coaster, and an expensive undertaking, but we are so glad that we've used

an integrative suite of treatments to address the pain and buy him more time. There is no curing bone cancer, just making the patient comfortable. Tully is a happy fellow, and has no idea that he is sick... which is exactly the point of all these treatments.

We are hopeful for our sweet big boy. He has shared his delightful demeanour, calming presence and hip-checking hugs with so many people in his short life so far. With luck and care, we will enjoy many more days of wolfhound bliss together.

Dr. Jason Rowan practices integrative medicine at his urban clinic, "Pandosy Village Veterinary Hospital", in Kelowna BC. Dr. Jason was trained in conventional medicine at the University of Saskatchewan, and in Traditional Chinese Medicine at the Chi Institute in Beijing, China. He works cooperatively with other veterinarians throughout Canada, offering holistic treatments and complementary medicine in person and over the phone.

To find out more about Dr. Jason's veterinary services, visit PandosyVet.com.

[Mistyglenn's Tulleigh O'Rowan can be found on Facebook and Instagram at #tullythewolfhound](#)

