

Managing Lung Cancer with Traditional Chinese Medicine



ROGUE'S STORY

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In June 2007 Kevin and I brought home a bundle of joy from Wolfhaven Irish Wolfhounds – our Rogue. Rogue was an exceptionally bright and happy hound who excelled in the show ring due to her outgoing nature. I had had plans to breed her, which quickly changed when I did her pre-breeding heart testing at age 4. Rogue was diagnosed with an arrhythmia known as Ventricular Premature Contractions (VPCs) and at that time it was recommended that we not breed her. We entered her into the Irish Wolfhound Foundation (IWF) VPC study and kept a close eye on her heart for the remainder of her years. Although beta-blockers were eventually suggested for Rogue, we chose to treat her naturally with diet and supplements such as wild salmon oil, ubiquinol, and hawthorn and the VPCs never became an issue. Therefore, when Rogue developed cancer we wanted to treat it naturally. We first discovered Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) at a time when we were desperate to help a young hound, Cernunnos, who had a huge

growth on his foot that kept recurring even after surgical excision. We were out of medical options and our allopathic vet suggested consulting a TCM vet. We found Dr. Allyson MacDonald through the International Veterinary Acupuncture Society (www.ivas.org). Over the course of 10 months we witnessed the power of TCM as that growth completely disappeared, never to return. Cernunnos is still living with us at the age of 8.5 years, and he is thriving! However, back to Rogue's story. In May of 2014, when Rogue was 7 years 1 month, I discovered a nodular, a free moving lump the size of a grape tomato in one of her mammary glands. Knowing she had VPCs, and not having the IWF's VPC study conclusion at that time, I was hesitant about putting her under anesthetic for the removal of the lump. I monitored it daily and it remained the same size through her next heat cycle. During the summer of 2015 the mass developed a fair amount of edema, and in August we started Rogue on a Chinese herbal formula – Jia

Wei Xue Fu Zhu Yu Tang.

As Rogue approached 8 years, she started having some problems with a sore back. I brought Allyson in to have a look, and to treat her with herbs and acupuncture. She also prescribed some basic daily exercises to help strengthen the muscles surrounding the sore area. We treated Rogue with daily Chinese herbs, exercise, acupuncture as needed, and also used cold laser therapy. I added elk velvet antler and Turmeric to her supplements to aid in keeping the inflammation down.

In November 2015 Rogue developed a slight cough. Allyson thought it best to get an x-ray so I took her to our clinic veterinarian to have that done. It was not good news. The x-rays confirmed Allyson's suspicions – a year and a half after finding the original mass,

the mammary tumour had metastasized to Rogue's lungs. After weighing the options that allopathic medicine had to offer we opted to integrate Chinese and Western herbal therapies. Our main concern was preserving a high quality of life while she was still with us. When I asked Allyson how long Rogue had left, she looked me in the eye, told me this was not good, and gave her an initial prognosis of "weeks". I guess Rogue wasn't listening!

Before we continue however, let's talk a bit more about what TCM is. First, when you, as an animal care giver, consider introducing an integrative practitioner into your animals' Care Team, it is important to understand what that practitioner will bring to the table. There is a plethora of options available to lengthen the quantity and quality of a pet's life. I would strongly suggest that whatever modalities you investigate, that you seek a qualified veterinarian to supply them. Only a fully trained veterinarian can properly educate you on how the alternative therapy will integrate with Western medical choices and whether there are any contraindications for mixing therapies.

We chose to integrate Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) into Rogue's therapy. We believe the great strength of this therapy is that it evaluates and treats the patient not the disease. The two main pillars of Chinese medicine are; the body has a life force or energy called Qi, and secondly the body is the most healthy when it is in a state of balance. Keeping the body balanced requires Qi so these two principles work together. Our dogs are all born with a bank account of energy called Jing; some of this comes from their genetics, some of it comes from the health and strength of the bitch while she is carrying and feeding the babies. Everything they do in life - reproduction, showing, competitive exercise and disease uses energy. If a dog receives healthy nutrition, supplements and quality exercise, they can generate enough energy to meet their daily needs, which allows them to keep their Jing in reserve. Dogs who receive poor nutrition or are in a high demand situation, such as neoplasia, cannot meet their needs from intake and will start to use up their Jing. The using up of Jing shortens their potential life span. This is one of the reasons TCM

practitioners emphasize nutrition as a part of therapy.

Consider the following example of how energy and balance interact. You may be able to call to mind a dog you have known who is always too hot (wants to sleep on tile floor, likes to be in the shade). Naturally, to return to balance, we want to cool this dog down. Compare this to hot water coming from a tap; you can cool it down by turning down the hot water OR turning up the cool water, two very different options. An experienced TCM practitioner examines the patient, asks questions about not only the patient as they are now but also their past response to the environment. Using this information an individual treatment is created to establish balance in temperature, body fluids and energy level; whichever is out of balance. For this reason in TCM a specific tumour will not be treated in the same way in all patients, and the same treatment may be used to treat different tumours.

There is a tendency to think of cancer as an unpredictable disease that may crop up anywhere. In fact, the current mainstream theory is that when cancer occurs it is a failure of the immune system. Every day many cells in our body divide incorrectly and have the potential to become tumours. 99.9% of the time our body's immune system recognizes the tissue as foreign, and breaks them down. In that small percentage of cases where the immune system is unsuccessful, a tumour may develop. In Chinese medicine, our approach is not to think, "How can we kill the tumour cells?" but rather to say, "How can we strengthen the host to expel the tumours?" The happy result of this is that, by definition, our therapies should make the patient feel better and improve quality of life. For Rogue our therapy was a three-pronged approach:

Vitamin A – Every cell in your body contains the same DNA. In a mature differentiated animal, each cell is programmed to express only a portion of the DNA to become, for example, either a lung cell or liver cell. Cancer occurs when cell differentiation fails to reach completion and the cells grow into large numbers of poorly differentiated cells. Normally functioning cells in the body exist for a preprogrammed amount of time, to perform their function. They then

undergo cell death, called apoptosis. The dead cells are then broken down and eliminated from the body. The poorly differentiated cancer cells do not undergo apoptosis, hence the exponential growth of the tumors. Vitamin A is a very important nutrient to encourage both cell differentiation and apoptosis and should be supplemented at high levels.

Yunnan Baiyao – This is a proprietary herbal formula, meaning it is made by only one company and the actual recipe is safeguarded. The main ingredient is Notoginseng. This formula is strongly anti-neoplastic and prevents bleeding. Both of these properties were important with Rogue as mammary tumour tissue, both in its original location and in the lungs, is a highly vascular tissue so stopping the mass from bleeding is life extending.

Jia Wei Xue Fu Zhu Yu Tang – The elegance of Chinese herbal medicine is that these formulas have evolved and been fine-tuned over time. Formulas contain 4 to 9 individual herbs. This means that we can use less of each herb, which prevents any toxicity. In addition, the herbs are mixed such so they potentiate or strengthen each other. The major function of JWXFZYT is to invigorate and move blood, and to break up the tumours that have formed. One of the elegant parameters of Chinese formulas is the inclusion of an "envoy" herb. In other words, certain herbs in the formula will direct the actions of the herbs to a particular area of the body. In Rogue's case the formula contained Platycodon and Cyathula which tend to guide the formula up to the chest. Also included in this formula are Curcuma and Aparganium, which are specifically anti-neoplastic.

We established a treatment protocol based on acupuncture therapy every three weeks. At each visit, Allyson would auscultate the lung field to assess progress. During the first several

months, an increase in lung sound indicated that the cancer was gradually spreading, but then her symptoms leveled off. Throughout it all, Rogue never appeared to be bothered much by the cancer. She was never short of breath, the herbs kept any coughing under control and she ran daily with our pack of hounds. She had the odd bad day, mostly due to the arthritis in her back, which Allyson would help with electro-acupuncture and cold laser therapy. *It should be noted that laser therapy must be used carefully in patients with neoplasia. Infrared laser therapy works on the mitochondria of individual cells in the treatment area to increase the health of those cells. Intuitively this means there is the potential we could strengthen the cancer cells.* Allyson was very careful to use a narrow field of treatment over Rogue's lower back. Although curiosity sometimes nagged at me, I never took Rogue back to the clinic for follow-up x-rays. I didn't see any point in putting her through that stress, and possibly causing more pain to her back by putting her up on the table. Knowing how much cancer was in her wasn't going to change our treatment protocol. So we really have no idea how widespread the cancer was.

Rogue's back became increasingly sore. In an effort to maintain her quality of life we added a low dose of Metacam to her treatment plan. Metacam was chosen not only for being a well-proven NSAID, but also because of its anti-neoplastic properties. However, after a few doses, it became evident that her stomach could not handle the medication, so we removed it. Following that, she had a hard time keeping her normal food down so I switched Rogue from her life-long diet of raw food, to cooked food which bought us a little more quality time with her. In the end, it was not Rogue's heart or her lungs that failed her. Almost 7 months post diagnosis of the lung tumour, her gastrointestinal system started to break down. We tried several Western remedies for GI problems, but it soon became glaringly obvious that Rogue was just going to waste away if we didn't let her go. It was especially hard as she never lost her appetite for a moment. She just couldn't keep the food down. It was both a hard and easy decision to let Rogue go. Although I was deeply sad knowing that the time had finally come, my intellect

knew that we had reached a line in the sand ... that line we weren't going to cross just to keep Rogue with us for a few more uncomfortable days. When vital systems start to shut down in a sick being, there is nothing we can do to make them work again, and we had to be realistic. We would not let Rogue go without her dignity, and we would not let her suffer a lingering, painful death. I made the tearful call to my vet's office and arranged for our clinic vet to come to the house the next morning. Unfortunately, Allyson was on holiday at the time, and could not be there in Rogue's final moments. Rogue was still bright and happy on her last day, chasing squirrels with the pack that she had led for many years. Nevertheless, when our vet came out to help her leave, I saw how tired she really was. Rogue left this life quickly and peacefully, as if she was ready to go, 7.5 months after we confirmed the lung tumour. It was the last gift we could give her. She was 9 years and 3 months of age.

Given that my reason to write this article is to open your mind to TCM, I would like to address the cost of Rogue's treatment. In order to make decisions in the best interest of your companion, it is helpful to know what kind of financial costs you will be facing. Of course, exact cost will vary from one practitioner to another, but this will help give you a general idea. Rogue's acupuncture treatments, which she was receiving every three weeks once we found the lung tumour, were \$120 (\$55 mobile fee + \$65 for the actual treatment), and the herbal formulas she was on varied in price. Over the course of 11 months, dating back to when we started her on the Jia Wei Xue Fu Zhu Yu Tang for the original mammary tumour, the total cost for TCM treatment came to \$3727.79. There were also additional costs at our clinic for the x-rays and various Western drugs that we tried near the end, coming to a total of \$835.92. Therefore, as you can see, TCM can be a viable route financially. If you carry pet insurance, there are riders available that you can add to your policy to gain coverage for acupuncture and other complimentary treatments.

I'd also like to touch on a personal observation about my journey with Rogue and her illness. It was only in the

aftermath of losing Rogue that I realized how much our lives had come to revolve around her. And it was also then that I realized how much personal energy I had been giving to Rogue and her needs. Life with the hounds became simple again, and I felt a little guilty about being able to breathe easier, and take a break from my vigilant watch. Caring for a sick hound takes a huge emotional toll on a person. I feel it is important to acknowledge that, and to ensure that we care for ourselves while managing the needs of others. We are no good to our hounds if we allow ourselves to get run down.

TCM requires an openness to something that is not well known in our Western culture. In cancer cases, Chinese medicine aims to strengthen the animal in order to help it fight the cancer, as opposed to targeting the cancer cells, and taking a little of the animal's life with each treatment. Receiving a diagnosis of cancer in a beloved companion is a frightening thing to face. It is easy to feel utterly helpless and totally overwhelmed all at once. Whether one chooses an allopathic course, a TCM or other alternative approach, or a combination of modalities, I do not believe that there is only one right way to treat cancer. We all need to follow a path that is comfortable for us and for our companions. My hope with this article is to help broaden the horizon just a little. While I initially may have had thoughts of, "Should we have gone the allopathic way?" I will never regret the journey that we took with Rogue. It was the last great lesson that she taught me.