



ORAL SQUAMOUS CELL CARCINOMA IN THE CAT

Squamous cell carcinoma (SCC) is the most common oral malignancy in the cat, arising from either the jaw bones or the tongue. Squamous cell carcinoma is an aggressive cancer in the cat and is often not diagnosed until the tumor is advanced.

What are the symptoms?

Owners may notice a mass in the cat's mouth. Tumors that occur in the back of the mouth or under/on the tongue are rarely seen until signs of drooling, weight loss, halitosis (bad breath), difficulty eating, and bloody discharge from the mouth are noted. Loose teeth can also be a symptom of oral cancer in the cat.

How is it diagnosed?

A tissue biopsy is necessary to definitively diagnosis SCC. X-rays of the jaw are helpful in determining the presence of bone destruction, but often underestimate the extent of involvement. Routine bloodwork and chest X-rays are recommended to assess your cat's overall health prior to anesthesia and biopsy.

Can it be treated?

Oral SCC is a very aggressive cancer in the cat. Severe and extensive bone involvement is common. Most cats present with advanced disease, making surgical removal impossible.

Radiation and chemotherapy have been used to treat oral SCC in the cat with little success. Although these tumors may shrink initially with treatment, the tumors often regrow rapidly after treatment is completed. Most cats have enough difficulty eating at the time of diagnosis that feeding tubes may be necessary if radiation therapy is to be pursued.

What is the prognosis?

The prognosis of oral SCC in the cat is extremely poor. The 1 year survival rate is less than 10%, even with combinations of radiation therapy and chemotherapy. Pain medications, such as piroxicam and buprenorphine, may be helpful in reducing discomfort associated with the tumor. However, most cats are euthanatized due to their inability to eat and drink and poor quality of life within 1-3 months of diagnosis.