

## Book review

### **CANINE AND FELINE GERIATRIC ONCOLOGY;**

### **HONORING THE HUMAN-ANIMAL BOND**

**By Alice Villalobos, DVM, with Laurie Kaplan, MSc.      Blackwell Publishing**

**ISBN 978-0-8138-0266-4**

My decision to purchase this book arose from attending the North American Veterinary Conference. One of the speakers at a session described 'The Quality of Life Scale' contained within this book and the guidance this gave her when it came to the end of her own pets' life. This encouraged me to enquire further and ultimately purchase the book.

It is true to say this book is certainly not just another text book and approaches the subject matter in a novel, if not unique, way. This describes not just about the nuts and bolts of oncology but treats the subject in a caring compassionate way. It also contains real stories, about real people in real life situations doing their best to save their companions. For example the story of Rosie, belonging to Dr. Robert Miller, and her three and a half year battle with anal sac adenocarcinoma, is used to not only illustrate the clinical management of the condition but how Rosie's quality of life was sustained for as long as possible.

Dr Villalobos covers the molecular biology of cancer and aging, the basic types of cancer and their biological behaviour and the warning signs of cancer in the first section of the book. I found the Chapter on warning signs particularly useful and although it is rarely hard for me to discover new information, I learnt that oral cancers are usually discovered late in the course of the disease despite the presence of early warning signs. Also cats living with a smoker in the household are 5-10 times more likely to develop oral squamous cell carcinoma and intestinal lymphoma due to the grooming of carcinogens from their fur.

Dr Villalobos goes on to describe the various treatment modalities available including some that may become available in due course such as molecular and gene therapies. She also considers chemoprevention (the concept of providing natural or synthetic compounds to reduce cancer risk) and immunonutrition at some length. Whilst accepting the controversial nature of the area and pointing out that some agents can cause adverse effects, she does not dismiss alternative medicine out of hand. She accepts that this is an owner showing that they want to do everything they possibly can to help their pet in face of the adversity of cancer and as long as 'it does

no harm' then is willing to accept its use as a complementary therapy. A table listing drug-herbal interactions puts this into perspective.

I feel the chapter on pain control is an excellent and thorough analysis and provides many practical tips that can be used in our own practices.

Throughout the book Dr Villalobos takes a practical approach to her subject and writes in a very open way. She accepts that accidents do happen, such as extravasations of doxorubicin, and describes techniques that she has found to help this devastating scenario- the 'Villalobos Modified Snakebite Slit technique'- on occasion.

As I have said this book is also about our clients and how cancer in their aging companions affects them and what we can do to support both parties in this relationship. Dr Villalobos discusses ethics, empathy, conflict of interests and how to help in decision making. She obviously works with her clients as advocates.

The last two chapters of the book discuss the end of life palliative care and euthanasia. Dr Villalobos likes the word palliative as it has the word 'pal' in it. She has developed what is essentially a program of hospice type care which she calls 'pawspice'. This is based around maintaining quality of life and defining it in terms of the quality of life scale (The Hurt-Hunger-Hydration-Hygiene-Happiness-Mobility-More good days than bad days Scale).

Dr Villalobos sends her clients a six inch engraved paw print as an after-life gift when the time comes. I think this illustrates the care and compassion with which she obviously goes about her life.

At every stage the book is illustrated with real life case histories not only about the animal companions but also about the people that care for them. Although clearly this book is written from a referral perspective it would still make a valuable addition to any practice library. It is not only packed with valuable practical information but I think it could have the potential to make you a better person!