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Saving Spencer: Is it Really Cancer? Ch. 2

Fri, 2017-12-01 07:52 — Robin Olson

(continued from [chapter 1](#) ⁽¹⁾)

I'm sitting back on the bed in the foster room, propped up against a few ratty old pillows. Foster kitten, Mighty Macaroon (Mac for short), is sitting high up on my chest, purring loudly, rubbing her face against my cheek. Her nose is wet. It makes me squirm. One at a time I can feel the tip of one of her claws extend, then retract, extend and retract as she flexes her toes. It hurts. I realize Mac is overdue for a claw-trim, but I can't get to it right now. I'd rather sit here and stare at the TV while she makes tiny pinholes into my skin. Being in this room is my escape from what is in the room below me, Spencer, laying on the heated bed, wheezing ever so slightly as he sleeps. He's doing all right, right now, but I don't want to think about what may or may not be inside his abdomen.

It's the night of Thanksgiving and I am not thankful for anything. I'm just tired and angry and scared. Getting lost in a TV show is my escape. A healthy, purring kitten makes me forget about the senior who is not, even if my escape only lasts a little while.

*I haven't been going for my walks. The pain in my knee is too much. I'm not eating well. I know I'm gaining weight. After all I did to drop over 50 pounds, my fear of it coming back is likely to be realized. The stress is too much. I should probably start boozing it up or taking anti-anxiety medication or running away from home and getting myself into more trouble, **but I also know I can be strong. I can face these things I fear most and I can fight to protect my loved ones. Maybe I just need a break and "hiding" in the foster room is as much as I'm allowed.***

Dr. McDaniel reviewed Spencer's case with us. As often happens, though we did have needle aspirate results, they only pointed to the *likeliness* of it being carcinoma, but it was not definitive by any means. **There are times when you must know what you're dealing with, but many times it's a gray area.**



©2017 Robin AF Olson. Resting on the way home from yet another vet visit.

In Spencer's case, it's becoming more clear that we need to know for a variety of reasons.

Dr. McDaniel reviewed our options:

1. Surgical removal of the mass. Have it biopsied. Examine the pancreas, liver, kidneys, etc and biopsy or remove the liver lesions if appropriate. We would have to talk to the surgeon, Dr. Weisman, to get more details on how this would happen. Being that Spencer is 15 and has kidney disease and is cranky are all factors to consider. **That said, it's likely that removal of the mass could extend Spencer's life a YEAR or more if we follow up with some sort of chemo.**

2. Chemotherapy administered in the hospital via an IV. This is not an option for Spencer because of how fractious he is so we didn't discuss it much. She did add that this sort of chemo might not give us much of a different result than her third

option.

3. Palladia®. It's a relatively new therapy for dogs with mast cell tumors. Apparently it can work very well on different types of cancer and that cats can tolerate it well. It does have some scary, hopefully short-lived, side-effects.

It can possibly stop tumor growth and reduce the size of any existing tumor. The pill is given 3 times a week at home and it would require a monthly vet visit to check blood work. Dr. McDaniel has had good results with it in cats and feels like it could be beneficial for a time. **We could skip the surgery and just go to Palladia, BUT ONLY IF SPENCER HAD A GOOD response to the chemo. He might get 6 months or so.**

4. IF Spencer is a good candidate for surgery, the best result we could get would be surgery plus Palladia, or potentially another drug, given at home once we have biopsy results post surgery. That way we could target the medications to what sort of cancer Spencer has.

But...

Spencer has a weird cough. It started early in the autumn. I thought it was seasonally related and mentioned it to Dr. Larry. He said we'd explore that when I brought Spencer in for his 6-month recheck in December since Spencer wasn't in distress. Since we didn't get to do that and I mentioned it to Dr. Mary, she did see something on Spencer's x-ray. Dr. McDaniel saw the x-ray, too and wanted to get a better angle on Spencer's chest because she was concerned there was a mass behind Spencer's sternum.

Dr. McDaniel explained that there's a lymph node in the area of concern and it could be inflamed. Though odd to imagine, that lymph node is responsible for draining fluid build-up in the abdomen. So, it would make sense that this could be lymph involvement instead of cancer. *Could we do another x-ray?* It would mean Spencer would have to be lightly sedated again.

Knowing that a mass in Spencer's lungs would tell us the cancer had metastasized, would also mean it wouldn't be worth considering surgery. We'd have been too late in the game to try so I agreed it was worth getting a second look at his chest. Spencer was none too happy about it, but thankfully they were able to get a good image.

Dr. McDaniel wanted a radiologist to review the image and give us a report. It was the cusp of the holiday so she was hopefully she'd have news that afternoon, but it wasn't a sure thing. Once again it was time to play the waiting game. Every time Spencer coughed or swallowed awkwardly, until we got the report, I wondered if it was a mass.

We brought Spencer home to recover. He was really hungry and it was comforting to see him chow down. He bounced back from the sedation very well, but meanwhile I was left to wonder where the update was and why I wasn't getting any news.



©2017 Robin AF Olson. *Snack time. I love Spencer's spots.*

Of course...*the holiday craziness*...so I waited...Friday passed, Saturday, Sunday...I called and left a message for Dr. McDaniel to call me. I found out she didn't return to work until Tuesday. I called to speak to Dr. Mary and found out the same thing. **I was resigned to waiting another day, but it was killing me.**

Monday night, Dr. Larry called. He'd gotten the report and said the radiologist felt it was **not** neoplasia (*cancer*), but normal geriatric changes. Though it seemed to be good news, he warned me that sometimes he's pushed back on a report and got different results. *He said that it still could be cancer and to talk to the oncologist about it again.*

On Tuesday, Dr. McDaniel called and left me a message. She was bright and upbeat. No cancer in the lungs. All was well. I was hesitant to be happy about this news until I heard the rest of her message...she'd asked her colleague, Dr. Porter, who is the Emergency & Critical Care Specialist, as well as our surgeon, Dr. Weisman, to look over Spencer's x-rays. They all agreed it was geriatric changes, NOT cancer. Maybe there was some light at the end of the tunnel? Our next steps, she suggested, would be to talk to Dr. Weisman about surgery if we felt that was an option for our boy.

I reached out to my friends and colleagues and asked them their opinion. Some said that Spencer's had a good run and to not do the surgery on him, that it would be too much on him and what if:

- *They open him up and find he's full of cancer. They'd put him down right then and there. Could you live with that?*
- *What if he doesn't survive the surgery?*
- *What if he dies shortly after the surgery?*
- *Why not just do the chemo at home and make your peace with it? It's certainly more affordable and less stress on everyone.*

Yesterday we met with Dr. Weisman. She'd done surgery on our boy, [Bob Dole](#) ⁽²⁾, five years ago. Last year she saved Annie's life when we discovered she had an intussusception and needed a portion of her intestines removed and stitched back together. **I trust Dr. Weisman completely. She doesn't sugar-coat anything and is a straight shooter. I like and respect her very much. She has the skills and is Board Certified. If someone was going to cut Spencer open, I'd want her to do it.**

Before we arrived at our appointment, Sam and I spoke about what to do for Spencer. One vet said not to do the surgery and just do Palladia, **but what if Spencer didn't have a good response to it? What if it wasn't the right treatment for his type of cancer? We wouldn't know what we were dealing with so we'd waste resources trying this and that.**

Spencer's been doing well at home. He brightened back up. He's eating. He's grooming himself. He even played a little bit a few days in a row. If we're going to do this it has to be soon, while he's strong. **Also, the mass is large and it must make him feel uncomfortable.**

Is it fair to Spencer to let him live out the rest of his life feeling uncomfortable with a mass inside him?

I was thinking maybe we shouldn't do surgery, but I changed my mind once Dr. Weisman filled us in on what she was planning on doing and how she felt things might transpire. **Then she blew my mind telling us something I didn't even want to hope for.**

She reviewed Spencer's records and even with his age and kidney issues, she felt he was a good candidate for surgery. She does these mass removals, literally EVERY DAY. What a sobering fact that cancer is on the rise that a majority of her surgeries are mass removals. She says pets are living longer so it's natural they would get cancer. I'm not sure I agree with that, but the bottom line is, she has a great deal of experience doing what she called an exploratory surgery on our boy.

Dr. Weisman would open Spencer up and assess the situation, then quickly come up with a game plan. She described some masses as being a simple blob with lots of fine tendrils hanging off it. It's really easy to remove that type of mass and get it biopsied. It takes all of 15 minutes. The question is, in Spencer's case, there are concerns that the mass is connected to a portion of his pancreas or his bile duct.



©2017 Robin AF Olson. You want to do WHAT to me?

Dr. Weisman explained that she could remove the ends of the pancreas but that depending on how it was connected to the mass, she might not be able to remove anything. She would, of

course, biopsy the mass so we could target treatment more appropriately. We'd also know what else is going on with his intestines and the lesions that were seen on ultrasound. Whatever needed to be removed, would be removed and/or biopsied.

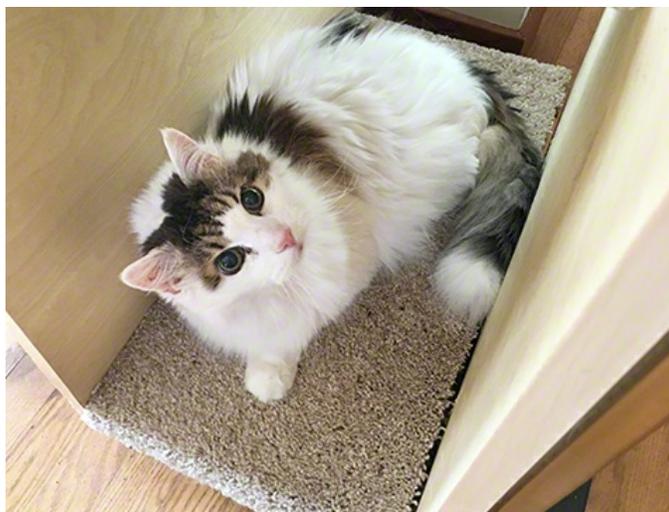
I asked about her putting Spencer down during surgery if he had a belly full of cancer. **She said there was NO WAY she was going to do that. Even if he did have cancer all over, since he was doing well at home, he could come home and we'd still do chemo and give him more time.** We'd just know we probably wouldn't have as much time as we had hoped for.

I asked about him surviving the surgery and her assistant said **95% chance**, which is pretty normal of most surgeries.

I asked about protecting his kidney function and they would do everything they needed to do to make sure his kidneys didn't get worse, but, like anything else, we don't know 100% how his kidneys will respond. In my mind they'd just be more fluid filled and flushed out so in theory Spencer should not feel any ill effects from that.

The bottom line was that Dr. W. felt Spencer was a good candidate if we didn't wait too long. We could take a few days to consider our options, so we set a date for the surgery so we'd have it if we wanted to move forward. It would mean a two-week recovery time for Spencer at home, with one to two days in the hospital right after the surgery was over. I'd have to prepare myself for him not being his perky self and trying to find faith that I could not only get him back to feeling good, but maybe even help him feel better than he's felt for a long time.

The devastating problem is, as much as I feel the surgery could give Spencer a very good year, or maybe more, there is no surgery if there is no way to pay for it.



©2017 Robin AF Olson. *Even with all he faces, Spencer still gets playful and enjoys life.*

I've begged, borrowed, drained out my 401K. There's nothing left. I have to depend on the kindness of all of you to consider helping Spencer have that blessed bonus year. There are no guarantees, **but...Dr. W. said one thing that made my jaw drop.**

It might NOT be cancer. It could be a necrotic fat mass. Though the odds were about 25% that it was a benign mass, there's still a tiny chance it's not cancer at all. We will never know if it's not cancer, or possibly give him chemo that he doesn't need, if we don't do the surgery and find out what that mass is.

To possibly gain a year or more of GOOD quality of life, Spencer **MUST HAVE SURGERY** on **TUESDAY, 12/5/17.**

I feel a lot of shame asking for help, but I need it badly for my boy. I've been asked to please not post a photo of the costs of each procedure or service, but I can post the total costs. I need to raise at least \$4300.00 by **MONDAY** night (eastern time), **December, 4** (a 75% deposit of the high amount is due when I drop him off before surgery). I realize it's a breathtaking amount of money, but I have to try.

Newtown Veterinary Specialists
 52 Church Hill Road
 Newtown, CT 06470
 (203) 270-8387

11/29/2017
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Kitten Associates, Inc
 PO Box 354
 Newtown, CT 06470

Client ID: 11882
 Treatment Plan ID: 19007
 Expiration Date: 8/24/2020

Item ID	Description	Staff Name	Low Qty	Low Amount	High Qty	High Amount
SKBASE	Surgery Base Estimate	Debra Weisman, DVM, MS, CV	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
4100	CBC (Complete Blood Count) ProCyle		1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
4079	Chem 15 & Lyses - Catalyfl		1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
2363	Peripheral IV Placement		1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
IVP1UP	IV FLUID SET UP		1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
2290	IV fluid pump daily		2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00
000014	Admin Primary IV 7/8 Macro		1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
1874	Admin Extension Set 32"		1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
000432	Lactated Ringers FL		1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
000015	Admin IV T-Cell Connector 5"		1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
320	Hospitalization - Day		1.00	2.00	1.00	2.00
LV2	Hospital Monitoring Level 2		1.00	2.00	1.00	2.00
4166	Hospitalization - Night		1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
LV2	Hospital Monitoring Level 2		1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
2335	Anesthesia Pre-med/induction Estimate		1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
5070	General Anesthesia - First 20 Minutes		1.00	3.00	1.00	3.00
ANES	General Anesthesia - Additional 30 Min.		1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
3978	Humid/Vent 1		1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
3250	Anesthesia Monitoring & Maintenance		1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
2333	Expiratory Surgery		1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
ORSPFEE	OR Surgery Fee		1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
8620	Estimated Medications To Go Home		0.50	1.00	0.50	1.00
000226	Collar Elizabethan Collar		1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
ICUNAJ	ICU/NURSING CONNECTIONS		0.50	1.00	0.50	1.00
RADIDEX	IDEXX Telemicine Radiographs		1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
6012	Bopsy w/ Description 2 Sites (Priority)		1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
444	Calcium injection		10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00
4302	Ativan 1q 10mg/ml		1.00	2.00	1.00	2.00

Low Subtotal: \$3,307.17 High Subtotal: \$4,285.73

Tax: \$0.86 Tax: \$0.86

Low Total: \$3,308.03 High Total: \$4,286.59

Freya dropped cat food onto the estimate

Payment will be required when your pet is released from the hospital.

deposit
\$3215.25

How to give Spencer a bonus year...

Don't donate if it's a hardship. You don't have to tell me you wish you could, but you can't right now. That's ok. I totally get it so don't worry. **If you feel like it, let your friends know our mascot needs their help and maybe some of them can provide a loving gift...** tell them that a lady who has spent so many years helping others, needs it now, more than ever, for her cat, not for herself.

Give a gift to Spencer [HERE](https://www.paypal.me/kittenassociates/5) [3]. Your gift is tax deductible and this is a great time to get a deduction before the end of the calendar year.

It's easy to donate a specific amount just use these links:

To donate \$5: <https://www.paypal.me/kittenassociates/5> [4]

To donate \$10: <https://www.paypal.me/kittenassociates/10> [5]

To donate \$25: <https://www.paypal.me/kittenassociates/25> [6]

To donate whatever you wish: <https://www.paypal.me/kittenassociates/> [7]

Please note: We choose not to use fundraising web sites because they charge a fee on top of the fee PayPal charges us so we get less of a donation. Some of the fundraising sites also take a LONG time to relinquish the funds and we do not have the luxury to wait. If we reach our goal I let you know so that we can close the fundraiser.

If you need to write a check, those gifts will go to Spencer's ongoing care since they won't arrive in time **Please make out your gift to: Kitten Associates and send it to: P.O. Box 354, Newtown, CT 06470-0354 and add a note that it's for Spencer.**

Your gift is tax deductible. [Kitten Associates](https://www.paypal.me/kittenassociates/) [8] is a 501c3 non-profit. Our EIN Tax ID is 27-3597692.



©2017 Robin AF Olson. Konked out. I can see your pink belly!

My goal is to make the most appropriate decision for Spencer, not a rash, emotional wish. I know that only hindsight is 20/20 and the rest is well-meant, hopefully thoughtful and not selfish, good intentions based on advice from medical professionals. The rest is up to him, his body and the secrets that lie within.

Please send Love & Light to my baby boy. Let's crush f-ing cancer together! ^[3]



©2013 Robin AF Olson. Me with our Covered in Cat Hair Mascot, Spencer.

If you have any questions about this fundraiser or Spencer's care (*by the way, we also plan on working with a holistic veterinarian and I hope to have some helpful information for you regarding those treatments*) you can contact me at: info@kittenassociates.org ^[9]

...to be continued...

Comments

Sat, 2017-12-09 13:40 — jmuhj (not verified)

Sharing to social media with ^[10]

Sharing to social media with heartfelt *PRAYERS* and hope for the very BEST for Spencer and for you all. May you be able to raise these funds very quickly.

Sun, 2017-12-17 19:12 — [Robin Olson](#) ^[11]

THANK YOU! ^[12]

We did it! He got the surgery, too. Read on for an update. xo

CICH @ [Google+](#)

Robin @ [Google+](#)

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