

## **FELINE SQUAMOUS CELL CARCINOMA**

Squamous cell carcinoma (SCC) is a highly malignant cancer seen in a variety of locations in cats. It is the most common cancer of the skin. The most common locations seen in cats include the skin (usually sparsely-haired, non-pigmented (white) areas), eyelids, nose, pinnae (ears), and the mouth. Most cats with SCC are middle-aged to older, although cats of any age can be affected. White cats, those with unpigmented skin, and those with increased sun exposure have an higher risk for developing SCC of the skin, eyelids, nose, and ears. There is increased risk for SCC of the tongue and mouth with the use of flea collars, and in smoking households. We also see an increased risk of this cancer in cats that have a history of stomatitis, since this chronic inflammation can lead to cancer formation.

Tumors on the skin, eyelid, or nose, have a variable appearance but may have a shallow or deep sore (ulceration), a raised, reddened area, or a cauliflower-like growth. Symptoms may be related to the location of the tumor and can include rubbing of the area, discharge, or bleeding from the area of the tumor, licking of the tumor, swelling, or pain. If the tumor is located inside the body, the symptoms are variable (nose bleeds, difficulty eating or swallowing, bloody saliva, bad breath, coughing, etc.). These tumors can be very locally aggressive, meaning that they can grow fast and can be invasive into tissues around the tumor. A diagnosis of SCC usually involves obtaining a biopsy (tissue sample) or aspirate (needle sample) of the affected tissues.

Once a diagnosis is made, further tests are performed to determine if the cancer has spread to other areas of the body (called staging tests). This type of cancer can spread to lymph nodes and lungs most commonly. Lymph nodes that drain the tumor site are tested with needle aspirate/cytology or potentially a tissue biopsy to look for spread of the cancer. Chest x-rays allow us to look for evidence of spread of the cancer into the lungs. A complete blood count (CBC), a serum chemistry profile, and urinalysis are often performed to provide important information regarding the effects of the cancer on body functions as well as the ability of the patient to handle future treatments.

The best treatment for this type of cancer is surgical removal of the tumor. Depending on the size and location of the tumor, surgical removal may or may not be feasible. CT scanning is often performed prior to surgery to evaluate the full extent of the tumor and determine if surgery is an option. Consultation with a board-certified surgeon may be recommended since these surgeries may require more aggressive tumor removal and specialized reconstructive techniques. The prognosis is significantly improved with complete surgical excision.

When surgery cannot be performed, other therapies can be attempted to slow the progression of the cancer, although this is not curative (called *palliative* treatment). Palliative treatments include radiation therapy, chemotherapy, and medical management of effects from the cancer (ie. pain, infection, bleeding, etc).

Please remember that each patient is an individual and can have variable presentations of their cancer and response to treatment. Specific details and recommendations for your pet can be discussed in detail during a consultation with the oncologists at the Animal Cancer Center of Texas.