

---

# Efficient Medical Care

## COOPERATION IS KEY IN SPECIALTY HOSPITALS

---

By: Dr. Suzanne Hunter, DACVS and  
Kate Lawrence, [www.gcvcs.com](http://www.gcvcs.com)

Last week Beau was a normal, happy Labrador and his biggest concern was whether or not he would be able to get to the dog park this week. Over the course of several days, however, Beau's owners began to notice that he was beginning to move more slowly, had a decreased appetite, and then he started vomiting. Obviously concerned, they took him to their family veterinarian, who saw that in addition to Beau's lethargy and vomiting, he also had a distended abdomen and pale gums. There are several emergency situations in which animals will exhibit these symptoms, so Beau's vet immediately palpated his abdomen, where he felt a large mass. Suspecting a tumor, Beau's veterinarian referred him to a veterinary specialty hospital for further diagnostics and treatment.

The first thing Beau's vet recommended when Beau arrived at the specialty hospital was for him to get an abdominal ultrasound with the Diagnostic Imaging department to see what organ the mass was involved with. The veterinary radiologist who evaluated the ultrasound saw that the mass was originating from Beau's spleen. The radiologist recommended surgery to remove the spleen - a delicate procedure. Beau's owners then consulted with a veterinary surgeon in the Surgery department, who explained that she suspected that Beau's splenic mass was a type of cancer, and that if the biopsy of Beau's spleen came back as a malignant tumor, she would recommend follow-up with a veterinary oncologist. Beau

underwent surgery and then did end up having chemotherapy with an oncologist in the Oncology department - all within the same hospital.

This type of interdepartmental cooperation is most often associated with human hospitals, but it is also an important part of the veterinary community! Specialty hospi-



tals, like Gulf Coast Veterinary Specialists, have multiple departments - from Surgery and Oncology to Ophthalmology, Dermatology, Internal Medicine and more... just like a human hospital. The availability of the board-certified specialists and their ability to work together within the different departments in the hospital allows the doctors to create the most comprehensive, effective treatment plans for each patient. For Beau, it meant the difference between only having about 2 months at home and being able to spend the better part of a year

with his family.

One of the most common pairings when dealing with interdepartmental cooperation is surgery and oncology. Many soft tissue surgery procedures involve removing tumors. In the case of cancer, surgery by itself can sometimes only give the patient a few months - but when the Surgery department works together with the Oncology department, many patients can end up with significantly more time to spend at home with their families. With cases like Beau's, the veterinary oncologist steps in with chemotherapy postoperatively, to try and prevent the spread of tiny cancer cells left behind by the original tumor inside the body. In other cases, if there is a large tumor, or the mass is in an area where it will be difficult for the surgeon to remove or close the incision, the oncologist can use treatments like radiation to try and shrink the tumor, allowing the surgeon to be able to remove the mass. Each case is different, and the surgeon and oncologist must work closely together to plan the best surgical and postoperative oncologic therapy for that patient's specific case.

Veterinary specialty hospitals function in a similar way to human hospitals, with all of the different departments working together as a whole. Because of this cooperation, the doctors are able to elevate patient care, individualize treatments, and provide the most specialized care possible for each patient. Cooperation is definitely a winning strategy when it comes to pet care!