

Big Mack and his Troubles

Mack is an 8.5 year old big, strong yellow lab who initially came in feeling well. He first presented with a cough that we felt was “kennel cough” because he had a sensitive trachea and light cough. Mack did not improve and instead worsened over a week. He came in with a fever, poor appetite (but still loved handfuls of treats here!), an enlarged lymph node and an eye with mild inflammation. The lymph node cytology showed cells suspicious of possible cancer. Other possibilities were tick borne disease or Blastomycosis.

While we waited for the pathologist review of the lymph node cells, Mack’s eye worsened despite cortisone drops and he developed a draining wound on his foot. The draining wound was the last clue we needed. It contained microscopic fungal organisms common to our area called Blastomycosis. At this point Mack was also seeing an ophthalmologist who confirmed our diagnosis, as well as a lab in Indiana we sent a urine sample to. Mack was immediately started on antifungal medication. Mack had a tough go of it, medication changes, additions of other meds and internal medicine specialists. We are happy to say he is now stable! His eye had initially developed glaucoma from the inflammation but that has stabilized. Mack has lost the sight in one eye but the normal eye has remained healthy.

Blastomycosis is a mean little fungus, *Blastomyces dermatitidis*, that lives in the soil of our area. We are considered an endemic area for it. It needs just the right temperature, PH and moisture to thrive. Our pets seem to pick it up mostly from newly turned soil. There happens to be a construction site near Mack’s home. Once the fungus is inhaled by the pet it goes systemic and can affect the skin, eyes, bones, lungs, CNS, nasal cavity and just about anywhere you can imagine. The treatment used to be very expensive and toxic IV meds but fortunately most respond well to oral antifungals. It’s a nasty little fungus that requires months of treatment. Fortunately we cannot pick it up from our infected pets. It’s 10x more likely to affect dogs than humans. Middle aged male hunting dogs are usually the primary recipients of the disease, most related to their “nose to the ground” habits.