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Popular Salt Lake City Radio Station's Mascot French Bulldog "Willow" Now Cancer Free

By Annie Phenix, CPDT-KA

(SALT LAKE CITY) Perhaps the scariest words pet owners can hear from a veterinarian are these: your dog (or cat) has cancer.

Owners can become so upset with that diagnosis that it's hard to concentrate and hear what -- if any -- options a pet has. Sadly, sometimes the options are slim to none and owners are given a few weeks or days to share with their pet. Hearing that a dog has cancer is an all-too-real possibility for a majority of dog owners as recent studies indicate that as many as 60 percent of dogs will get cancer in their lifetimes.

When Senior Account Manager Rochelle Beatty at Salt Lake City's radio station FM 100.3 (<https://fm100.com/>) learned that her three-year-old French Bulldog named Willow had cancer, her first thought was to call her son. "My adult son, Keanan, came over to the house immediately and he began to research what Willow's options were. Keanan is brilliant and we all come from a long line of dog people and there was no way we weren't going to try every thing we could do help our dog," Beatty says.

Willow is the popular mascot for the radio station, so her cancer diagnosis upset many listeners and fans. Willow has her own Facebook page: www.facebook.com/fm100willow. Beatty says that Willow is a super friendly, sweet dog whose main goal in life is to meet and greet as many people as she can. She's never met a stranger that she didn't like and she particularly loves children.

Last fall Beatty became worried about a small red swollen area on Willow's

front paw between the middle toes. She took Willow to her local veterinarian and the first diagnosis was that a foxtail had become stuck and was causing the swelling. “When I got her back home I noticed the formally red swollen area was now a dark more defined lump that also extruded through the back under the Metacarpal pad. Now I was really worried so I made an appointment with my regular vet the next morning,” Beatty says. Her vet suspected a tumor and performed a needle aspiration biopsy. Unfortunately, that procedure caused a lot of problems as the wound did not heal and Willow made many visits to the ER over the next week trying to stop the bleeding. Four days later, Beatty received the call she had been dreading: Willow had Grade II Stage 1 Mast Cell Tumor.

Keanan and Beatty consulted with their veterinarian to determine if there were any other options for Willow. As so often is the case, they were informed that the most likely way forward was to amputate the leg and then re-check Willow yearly to ensure that the cancer had not spread. If the Beattys did nothing, Willow would have a year or less to live. Keanan asked if there was a specialist they could obtain a second opinion from. That’s when they learned about Dr. Clayton Watkins. Dr. Watkins owns VetMed Consultants (www.vetmedutah.com). He is applying cutting-edge interventional technology in the treatment of such diseases as nasal and bladder tumors, urinary stones, intestinal polyps, and upper airway disorders.

Three years ago Dr. Watkins created a partnership with human radiation oncologist and brachytherapy specialist Dr. John K. Hayes, owner of Companion Curietherapy (6221 Highland Drive/Holladay, UT 84121). They have combined their human and animal experience of 60 years to offer state-of-the-art radiation treatment to animals. The pair recently received state approval for a radiation facility where animals can be treated on-site at their Holladay location. Notably, this is the first dedicated radiation facility for pets in Utah, and, the **first facility in the world** dedicated to HDR brachytherapy for pets.

Beatty and Keanan met with Dr. Watkins right away for a consult. “After we met with Dr. Watkins, he contacted Willow’s vet, Dr. Silkman, and they discussed the procedure and helped us to understand what would happen,” Beatty says. “Dr. Watkins and his staff were very informative and went over everything they would be doing and why he felt it would be a viable treatment. Willow received a single fraction of 12Gy radiation delivered to the affected paw via HDR brachytherapy. Eight brachytherapy catheters were used to deliver the treatment. About two months after the first

treatment it appeared the mass was completely gone! We opted for a second dose of 8Gy eleven weeks later to ensure the mast cell tumor did not recur."

Willow is now four years old and she has no signs of cancer. Best of all, she got to keep all of her limbs. She had no ill side effects from the radiation. Beatty reports that Willow happily wiggles whenever she is at VetMed or at her regular veterinarian's office. She has resumed her important duties as the FM 100.3 mascot.

Such an incredible outcome is becoming the norm for Drs. Watkins and Hayes. They have been using brachytherapy for three years and have many successful outcomes for both cats and dogs. Pet owners who get that awful diagnosis of cancer need to be referred to VetMed Consultants from their regular veterinarian.

"Our clients love the results we can get for their family pet. Brachytherapy is not painful and does not result in systemic side effects," says Dr. Watkins. "Compared to other types of radiation, brachytherapy provides a higher dose of radiation and less exposure to normal tissues, it's less expensive, and it is better shaped to the tumor we are targeting."

Beatty and Keanan and especially Willow are relieved to have found Dr. Watkins and his team. "I wish every pet owner knew these great doctors are right here in Utah! They are truly miracle workers!" Beatty says. She says Willow agrees.

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