

Amazing Work with Cancer Detecting Dogs

Sniff for Life is the slogan for a new charity based near Bicester: **Cancer and Bio-detection Dogs**. The charity, registered in 2008, trains dogs to help people by recognising the odour of human diseases. The dogs are of two types, with different roles.

Dogs Detecting Cancer

The charity was founded by Claire Guest, previously a dog trainer at Hearing Dogs for Deaf People.

Some years ago, a member of staff at Hearing Dogs was alerted to visit her doctor by her Dalmatian who persistently worried at a mole on her leg. It turned out to be a dangerous melanoma. She asked Claire whether her dog could be formally trained to alert to other types of cancer.

After a discussion on radio where a cancer specialist declared an interest in following up anecdotal stories of dogs detecting cancer, all three got together, eventually setting up the first experiment which proved that dogs could detect bladder cancer in urine samples, (published as a paper in the British Medical Journal in 2004).

A team of Spaniels and Retrievers is now just coming to the end of the bladder cancer project in partnership with scientists from Amersham hospital. The next project will involve prostate cancer, and in future, possibly other types of cancer. The aim of the research is to assist scientists in the development of 'electronic nose' machines, leading to earlier and non-invasive detection of cancer.

The dogs live with foster families, and are driven in to work three days a week. Like all 'sniffer' dogs they are very lively and mad keen on their work.

Medical Assistance Dogs

The charity has also trained the world's first Addison's disease dog. You may have seen this on BBC 1's *Inside Out*. This disease causes sudden collapse with no warning, but Coco is aware when it's going to happen, alerts Karen, and fetches her medication. She can now enjoy life, feeling safe with Coco.



Another huge success is Bianca, who works with a little boy with brittle type 1 diabetes. Noah had to have blood tests every 40 minutes day and night, and his parents were terrified to go to sleep at night, as he has already had two brain seizures. Bianca never leaves Noah, and is able to alert his mother day or night, when his blood sugar gets dangerously low.

These dogs are saving lives (*and* saving the NHS money!). We have started a small support group to raise funds and we have a volunteer socialiser with a medical alert puppy in training in Witney.

If you would like to join in fundraising events, please contact: 01993 831909, or oxon.supportgrp@cancerdogs.co.uk. We hope to have a dogs' picnic in the summer. I am happy to come and talk to any local group.

Do have a look at www.cancerdogs.co.uk and www.hypoalertdogs.co.uk

I guarantee you will be bowled over!

Heather Shute