

# PET WELLNESS

## Animal Cancer Care Clinic Creates a Positive Haven for Pets and Their Owners

Having a family member diagnosed with cancer can be a very trying ordeal. For pet owners, the reality is no less painful. The Animal Cancer Care Center (ACCC) works to alleviate some of that pressure. With a medical staff of more than 15, the center initiates treatments such as chemotherapy, radiation therapy and integrative medicine in an attempt to eradicate cancer and provide animals with a better quality of life. "We want the [animal] to have a normal life," said Dr. Stephanie Correa, DVM, a medical oncologist. "That is what we are striving for. Quantity, yes, but we want the quality to be good."

As one of the only oncology veterinarian practices in South Florida, the ACCC and its services are in high demand. Correa has since opened a fifth office, located in Fort Lauderdale, last August. Other locations are Deerfield Beach, West Palm Beach, Miami and South Miami.

Clients from all over the southern portion of the state are willing to travel various distances for ACCC services. Marilyn Gula, of Coral Springs, learned that both of her wheaten terriers, Erin and Shannon, had cancer only weeks apart. Erin underwent surgery and in less than eight weeks the cancer was back.

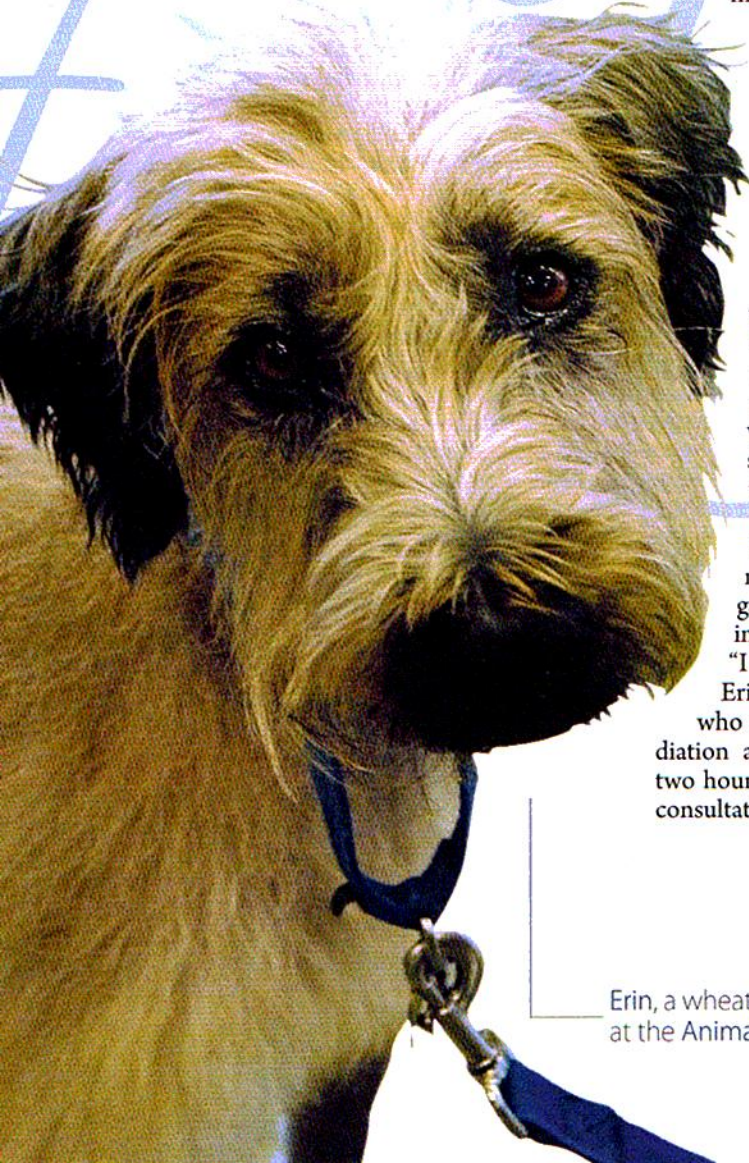
She needed an honest opinion and an optimistic treatment plan and the ACCC gave her just that. "It's a blessing that I got here," she said. "I couldn't be in another place." Erin's doctor, Pedro Dominguez, who specializes in veterinarian radiation and medical oncology, spent two hours with Gula during the initial consultation. Gula believes she was

able to make informed and confident decisions regarding Erin's treatment because of Dominguez's ability to provide a thorough evaluation. "You have to be a special kind of doctor to go through this," she said of Dominguez. "His compassion is his gift from God. He is a guardian angel for Erin." Gula recognizes the need for strength when experiencing such tribulations. Before her dogs' diagnoses, she lost her husband to cancer. A support system and a familiar atmosphere can create a positive mindset, something she thinks is imperative in order to get through anything. "I meet the nicest people here. I get my counseling from just talking to others," she said.

However, sometimes the reality is too hard to bear. In addition to facing their pet's diagnosis, clients must also deal with the possibility of euthanization. Jodi Levine Timna, the center's director of social work, offers bereavement services to clients who have had to face this situation.

"Animals are a part of our family," she said. "People don't realize that they represent so much more than a pet." Timna thinks that pets act as a buffer for animal owners. When these owners face other types of loss, they are not forced to endure the severity of the situation because the effects are barred by the close relationship they have with their pet. However, once the pet owner has to face the loss of their beloved dog or cat, suppressed emotions resurface, creating tremendous amounts of grief.

She offers private counseling for all ACCC clients and group meetings for pet owners in the community to work through these feelings of depression. "Some people feel ashamed because they are so affected but it [group meetings] is somewhere to go where their feelings can be heard and validated," she said.



Erin, a wheaten terrier, is a patient at the Animal Cancer Care Center.

The center provides a range of services tailored to each of their clients but sometimes just the professional quality of the staff and the warm clinic atmosphere foster a sense of reassurance and positivity for both the pets and animal owners. From a coffee bar, to the makings of an Internet café station, clients are made to feel welcome and comfortable. Large windows flank the reception area, creating a bright open space, enhanced by a green and orange decorative color scheme. "We wanted to make it happy, no white walls," said Tracy Castillo, the front desk manager and doctor/patient liason.

As patrons open the doors to the Animal Cancer Care Clinic, they are greeted with soft jazz music, portraits of dogs lining the walls and a warm smile from the reception staff. With the reality that many of these pet owners face, this is sometimes just enough to kick start their optimism.



Dakota gets examined by Dr. Stephanie Correa.

## Group Counseling

6 p.m. every other Wednesday  
Free and open to the public  
Animal Cancer Care Clinic  
1122 NE Fourth Ave.  
(954) 224-9998

## Services

- Radiation Therapy
- Chemotherapy
- Integrative Medicine
- Acupuncture
- Traditional Chinese Veterinary Medicine
- Tui-na (spinal manipulation)
- Food Therapy
- Social Work and Bereavement Services
- Private Counselling
- Bi-monthly Group Meetings (open to the public)

## Animal Cancer Care Clinic

1122 NE Fourth Ave.  
(954) 527-3111

[www.animalcancerclinic.com](http://www.animalcancerclinic.com)



The center's front desk staff includes Corin Chapman, Tracy Castillo and Linda Sanders.



The center's director of social work, Jodi Levine Timna.