General Information

Source: NBC Nightly News
Creator: Brian Williams/Dr. Nancy Snyderman
Event Date: 07/07/2014
Air/Publish Date: 07/07/2014

Resource Type: Video News Report
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Copyright Date: 2014
Clip Length: 00:02:33

Description
Researchers at the University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine are hoping a dog’s extraordinary sense of smell can play a role in creating a new test that detects ovarian cancer in tissue samples.

Keywords
Dogs, Cancer, Ovarian Cancer, Detection, Animals, University of Pennsylvania, UPenn, School of Veterinary Medicine, Penn Vet Working Dog Center, Abramson Cancer Center, Test, Screening Test, Cynthia Otto, Nose, Smell, Sense, Scent, Chemicals, Blood, Tissue, Tissue Samples, Cancer Positive, Positive, Cancer Cells, Develop, Technology, Electronic Nose, Women, Women's Health, Oncology, Ovaries, Ovary, Research, Study

Citation
MLA
"Using Dogs to Detect the Scent of Ovarian Cancer." Nancy Snyderman, correspondent. NBC Nightly News.
Using Dogs to Detect the Scent of Ovarian Cancer

BRIAN WILLIAMS, anchor:
Back now as promised with medical news about how dogs can help doctors save lives by detecting one of the deadliest forms of cancer, ovarian cancer, with an astonishing level of accuracy, one of them finding cancer correctly about 90% of the time. We get our report tonight from our Chief Medical Editor, Doctor Nancy Snyderman.

DOCTOR NANCY SNYDERMAN, reporting:
A morning jog gives Carolyn New some time to get to know her Springer Spaniel McBaine. Carolyn fosters the dog while he takes part in a new program at the University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine.

CAROLYN NEW: He's just been an incredible addition to my life. I mean he's changed my life.

DR. OTTO: He's got cancer detection.

DR. SNYDERMAN: He's also working hard to change the lives of other women. McBaine and three other dogs--

DR. OTTO: He did gain weight.

DR. SNYDERMAN: --are being trained in hopes of developing a screening test that could identify ovarian cancer in its early stages.

DR. OTTO: Ready to go to work?

DR. SNYDERMAN: Doctor Cynthia Otto runs the program at Penn Vet Working Dog Center.

DR. OTTO: Our goal is not to put a dog in every hospital, a lab in every lab, but what we really want to do is help refine the technology by using the exquisite ability of the dog's nose.

DR. SNYDERMAN: And a dog's nose knows. A dog's sense of smell is about 100,000 times more sensitive than a human's.

MAN: Seek.

DR. SNYDERMAN: Here's how it works. The dogs learn the sense of chemicals emitted by ovarian
cancer in tissue and blood. They are rewarded when they stop in front of the cancer positive sample on this wheel.

MAN: That's good job, Bud.

DR. SNYDERMAN: Eventually cancer doctors at the University of Pennsylvania's Abramson Cancer Center will collaborate with chemists and physicists. The goal is to develop an electronic nose specific to ovarian cancer that will duplicate what the dogs are naturally able to do. Barbara Lister was diagnosed with advanced ovarian cancer. She donated her tissue samples to the study in hopes of finding a test that would spare other women the ordeal she's gone through.

BARBARA LISTER: Anything that can be done to prevent things in the future, it would just be great. I'm glad I'm a part of it.

DR. SNYDERMAN: Dogs have already been used to detect lung cancer and melanoma, but with this advance of the ovarian cancer, it will hope it lead to an electronic nose that's available for general use in the next couple of years that is so far proven so accurate, it's over 90% accurate, Brian.

WILLIAMS: All the more reason to love and admire these animals. Nancy Snyderman, as always, thanks.