

Chemotherapy for Ferrets with Insulinoma

Avian and Exotic Animal Care, PA

Raleigh, North Carolina

(919)844-9166

Chemotherapy is now available for ferrets diagnosed with insulinoma. The protocol typically involves four sessions, administered at three-week intervals, but may be altered depending on the needs of the individual patient. The drug of choice is called doxorubicin, which works by inhibiting the synthesis of DNA, RNA, and protein in rapidly dividing cells. It is commonly used in treating many different types of tumors in small animals. Chemotherapy is most successful in ferrets that have recent onset of mild symptoms, and in those with no symptoms that have been diagnosed by routine blood glucose monitoring.

Prior to beginning chemotherapy, a complete physical examination, and bloodwork including complete blood count (CBC) and blood glucose are required. As with other chemotherapy drugs, doxorubicin can sometimes cause mild to moderate immune system suppression, so the CBC is re-evaluated before each appointment. Doxorubicin should not be used in patients with heart problems, so chest x-rays and/or electrocardiogram (ECG) are required to help evaluate the health of the heart. Each session requires a brief anesthesia and placement of an IV catheter. This is important because doxorubicin causes severe tissue irritation if any drug is injected in the muscle or under the skin. An injection of an antihistamine is given to help prevent any reactions to the medication. Ferrets receiving doxorubicin do not experience hair loss, and typically do not experience nausea or diarrhea. While gastrointestinal upset, discolored urine and heart problems are potential side effects of this drug, most of our patients experience no adverse effects. While individual responses vary, most of our patients experience an increase in blood glucose levels, increased energy and improved quality of life.

A few special precautions are necessary after chemotherapy. Your pet should be kept separated from other animals for 2-3 days following each treatment. You should wear gloves when cleaning the litter pan for 2-3 days. If any side effects are noted, or you have any questions or concerns, you should contact your veterinarian immediately.

Please contact us if you have any questions, or would like to set up an appointment for chemotherapy. Ferrets receiving chemotherapy need to be hospitalized the day before their treatment so that all laboratory testing may be completed. If your pet is taking any medications, please bring them with you for your appointment.