

A canine 'trooper' spreads message of survival

By Sloan Brewster
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A local dog's brain tumor could be used to create a vaccine.

Trooper, an 8-year-old German Shepherd from Avon, had surgery to remove a brain tumor, according to Dr. James Hammond of Pieper Memorial Veterinary Clinic in Middletown. While initially the dog was to be injected with the serum made from the tumor, that procedure has since been put on hold, the vet said.

But the serum itself is still in the works and the research surrounding it could lead to new treatments for people, specifically children.

"The idea about Trooper is the folks at the University of Minnesota are taking tumor cells and growing them, creating a vaccine that we can then inject to treat remaining cells left behind after surgery," Hammond said. "The importance [is] the idea that there is some significant progress coming down the line in terms of what we can do in terms of dogs with brain tumors, and hopefully, with people."

Trooper's story began in March when he started having seizures, his owner Karyn Economu explained.

Those first seizures were confusing though, because they were only in his eyes.

"He was having focal seizures – in his eyes – and he would stare off, he would not know his name, he would not respond to his name and his eyeballs did a funny thing," Economu said. "You knew he was in a seizure because his eyeballs went funny and his panting stopped."

He also drooled to the point where he became soaked.

"There was drool all over the house, everywhere," Economu said.

Economu took the dog to a local clinic, but two days later she woke to find the dog was having a full-blown seizure. They returned to the vet, who recommended they go to Pieper Memorial Veterinary Center where a mass was found in Trooper's brain.

Hammond gave Trooper two surgeries, one to remove a portion of the tumor and the second, a more aggressive operation, to remove the entire tumor and part of the brain.



Courtesy photo

Trooper, an 8-year-old German Shepherd from Avon, had surgery to remove a brain tumor, according to Dr. James Hammond of Pieper Memorial Veterinary Center in Middletown. Pictured above, Pieper staff painted paw prints on their nails in support of Trooper. While initially the dog was to be injected with a serum made from the tumor, that procedure has been put on hold, but the serum itself is still in the works and the research surrounding it could lead to new treatments for people.

Despite the surgeries, Trooper was still having seizures.

Trooper was put on anticonvulsive medication and medication to reduce swelling in the brain, Hammond said. The seizures have since stopped and the medication is being tapered off.

As Trooper's health has been improving, Economu has been taking him around to meet local residents and enjoy activities.

On Saturday, Aug. 2, he went to Lyme Bock Park to support participants in a fundraiser for the Fidelco Guide Dog Foundation, Economu said.

He is also scheduled to support runners in the Lobster Loop 5K race in Canton.

Economu also took him to a recent meeting of the Avon-Canton Rotary Club where, according to a press re-

lease, he met state Sen. Kevin Witkos.

"I was introduced to one of the most inspiring constituents I've ever met," Witkos said. "Not only was he a cancer survivor, still wearing the scars of a recent brain tumor surgery, but he was also on a special mission to bring others hope - all while walking on four legs."

Economu is working on getting Trooper certified as a therapy dog in order to take his inspiring message even further, she said. She plans to bring him to visit cancer patients.

"If Trooper makes just one child with cancer happy, if he can give just one person a sense of hope, then we've done our job," she said in the press release. "If there is hope for my dog, there is hope for you, too."

She also wants to spread the word about the research being done in Minnesota, especially because it will not only help dogs with tumors but may one day help humans with cancer.

Though a biopsy of Trooper's tumor was inconclusive, it was sent to Minnesota and will be part of the research project there, Hammond said.

"They are looking to translate the therapy," Hammond said. "Potentially [it could] go across to human medicine."

For more information on the University of Minnesota's program, visit braintumorprogram.org. To learn more about Trooper visit facebook.com/friendsoftrooper.



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