

Canines' cancer-sniffing snouts show 90%-plus accuracy

By Angela Zimm, Bloomberg

Which is better at detecting cancer, a laboratory or a Labrador retriever?

Consider the talents of Tsunami, a regal-looking dog with attentive eyes and an enthusiastic tail wag for her trainer friends. University of Pennsylvania researchers say she is more than 90 percent successful in identifying the scent of ovarian cancer in tissue samples, opening a new window on a disease with no effective test for early detection that kills 14,000 Americans a year. When found early, there's a five-year survival rate of over 90 percent.

With 220 million olfactory cells in a canine snout, compared with 50 million for humans, dogs have long helped on search-and-rescue. Now, a growing body of evidence supports the possible use of canines by clinicians. The largest study ever done on cancer-sniffing dogs found they can detect prostate cancer by smelling urine samples with 98 percent accuracy. At least one application is in the works seeking U.S. approval of a kit using breath samples to find breast cancer.

"Our study demonstrates the use of dogs might represent in the future a real clinical opportunity if used together with common diagnostic tools," said Gian Luigi Taverna, the author of the prostate cancer research reported yesterday at the American Urological Association in Boston.

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