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BIOTECH CANCER AND CANINES

ABOUT 20% of all cancer patients succumb not to the disease itself, but rather to a complication called cachexia, which causes muscle wasting, fatigue, and anemia. Dogs with cancer

can get cachexia, too. In both man and man's best friend, the condition is debilitating and makes it difficult to endure chemotherapy and radiation.

Biotech VGX Pharmaceuticals is testing a form of gene therapy for canines with cachexia. Using shots in the animals' thighs, scientists at the Blue Bell (Pa.) company inject genes that are taken up by cells, resulting in higher levels of the growth hormone IGF-1. That helps reverse some of the symptoms of cachexia. VGX hopes to develop a similar technique for humans.

In the meantime, VGX is seeking approval in Australia to use its technique in pigs.

When the therapy is given to pregnant sows, it results in bigger, healthier piglets.

—Arlene Weintraub

