

Book surveys oncology research on man's best friend

By Paul Barrett, Bloomberg Businessweek

Dogs suffer similarly to humans from certain cancers. The emerging field of comparative oncology seeks therapies for people that build on treatments effective in canines (and vice versa).

In the book "Heal" dog lover and science journalist Arlene Weintraub conducts a brisk and often-moving tour of the frontier of comparative oncology. She describes cutting-edge research aimed at treatments for such ailments as lymphoma, breast cancer, and gastric cancer, the last of which took the life of Weintraub's older sister, Beth, at the age of 47—a loss that animates the author's account.

Dogs, Weintraub explains, "make ideal models for studying human cancer because, like us, they develop cancer naturally." Mice and rats, the main lab subjects for generations because of their low cost (and lack of personal charm), rarely develop cancer on their own. Rodents have to be genetically manipulated or implanted with tumors to mirror human cancer experiences. Even then, 9 out of 10 experimental drugs that cure rodents of cancer fail in humans.

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