ACT
animal cancer trust
fighting cancer in our pets

2021 survey results

General Public's Understanding of Cancer in Pets

3,432 respondents

Moulton COLLEGE

ACT
animal cancer trust

UON University of Northampton

General Public's Understanding of Cancer in Pets

Please help us to help vets to help pet owners.

You do not need to be a pet owner to complete this survey and all answers given will be used anonymously.

At the Animal Cancer Trust we are in contact on a daily basis with owners whose pets have been diagnosed with cancer, the one comment we hear regularly is "I didn't understand what my vet was saying".

When shocking or upsetting news is received it can become very difficult to take in all of the information being given. The goal of the Animal Cancer Trust is to be the first port of call for pet owners to find information and support as soon as the word cancer is mentioned.

The aim of this survey is to demonstrate the public's level of knowledge about cancer in pets and their understanding of the terms commonly used.

With the results of this survey we plan to produce a short education programme for first opinion vets to raise their awareness on what pet owners may or may not understand about cancer.
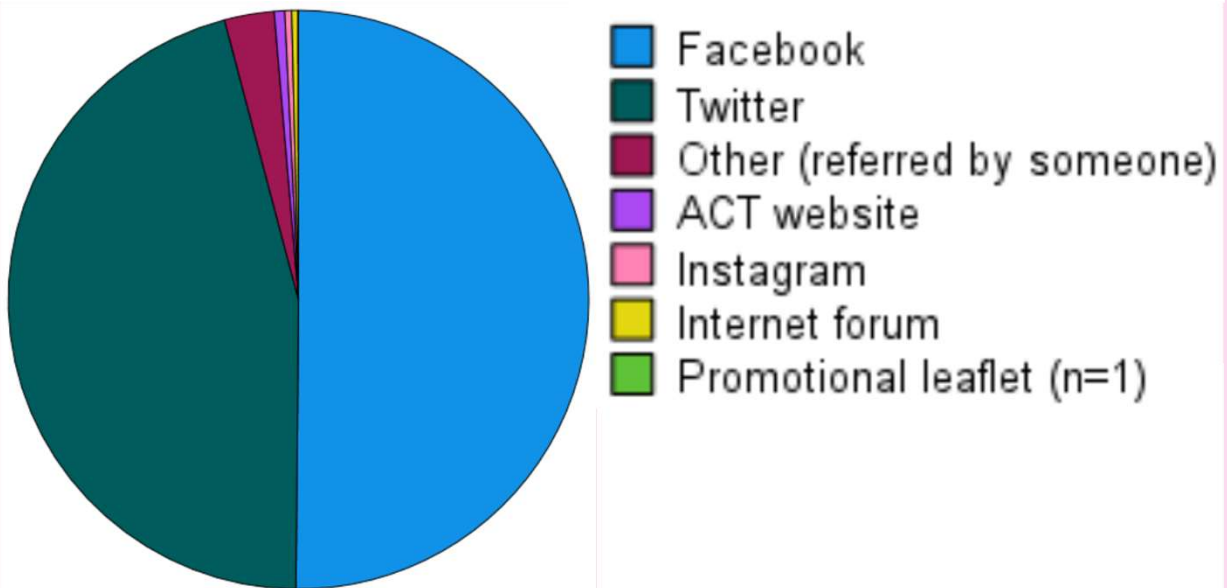
This survey formed part of a work experience project that was used by Rachel King as part of her FDSc Applied Animal Studies course.

General Public's Understanding of Cancer in Pets

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I person said 'No'
+ 19 said 'Not sure'
to "Can animals be diagnosed with cancer?"

1. How did you find out about this survey?

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Other (referred by someone)
- ACT website
- Instagram
- Internet forum
- Promotional leaflet (n=1)

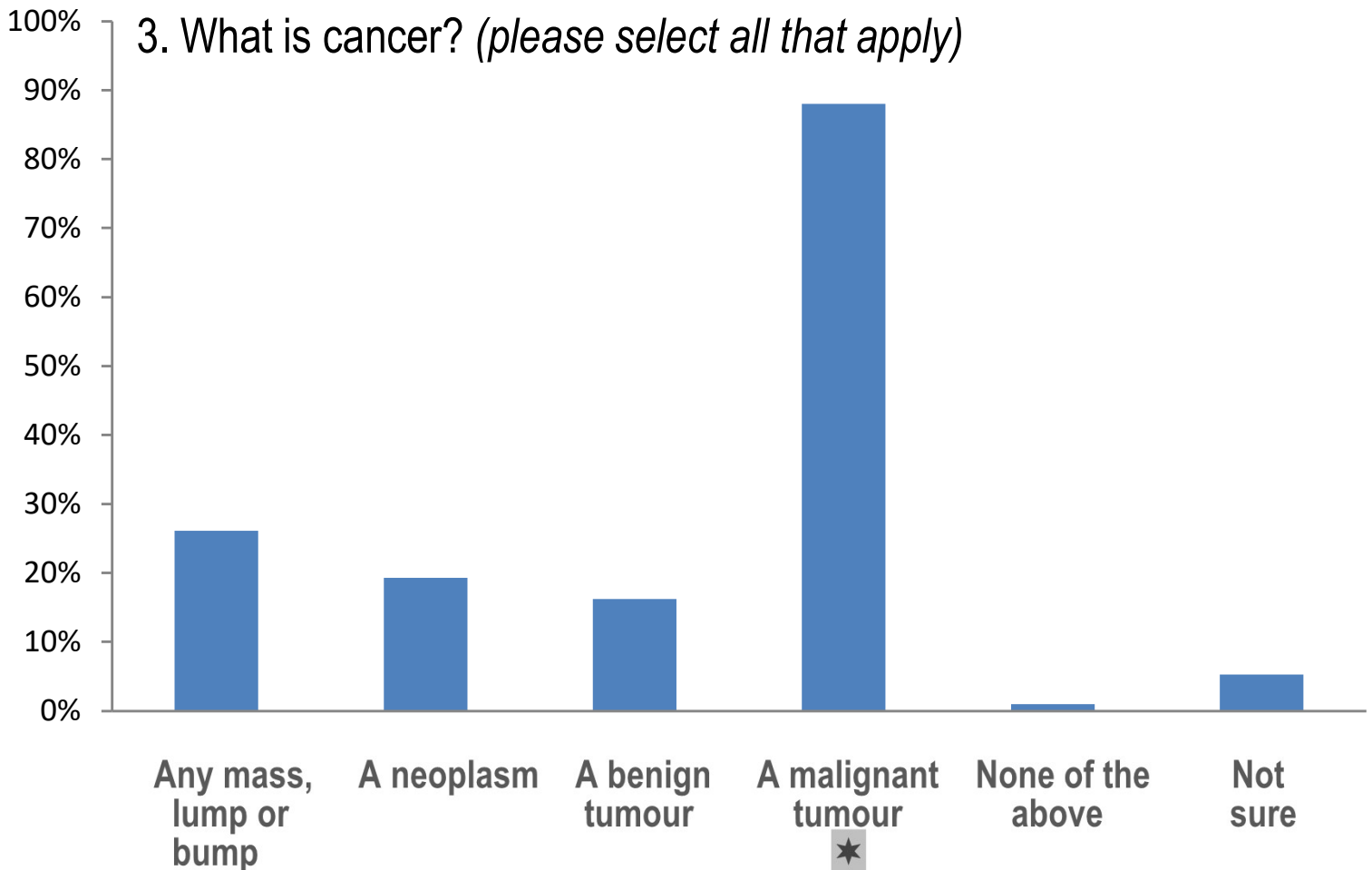The moral of this story is that social media is very powerful!

So why do we spend time + money on a website?

TO PROVIDE EASILY ACCESSIBLE + USEFUL INFORMATION!

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3. What is cancer? *(please select all that apply)*

100%					
90%					
80%					
70%					
60%					
50%					
40%					
30%					
20%					
10%					
0%					

Any mass, lump or bump — A neoplasm — A benign tumour — A malignant tumour ★ — None of the above — Not sure

The strictest definition of cancer includes any mass of proliferating cells.

This could include the following terms:

- Neoplasm
- Benign tumour
- Malignant tumour

but does not include other lump or bump that might be a cyst or abscess, etc.

Confusion can occur with the word 'cancer' in practice because we do not all agree on what is the true definition of cancer.

Many vets will use cancer to refer to a malignant tumour ★

Benign tumours grow locally and do not tend to spread to other parts of the body. If they are surgically removed, they usually do not grow back unless some cells have been left behind or invaded surrounding tissues.
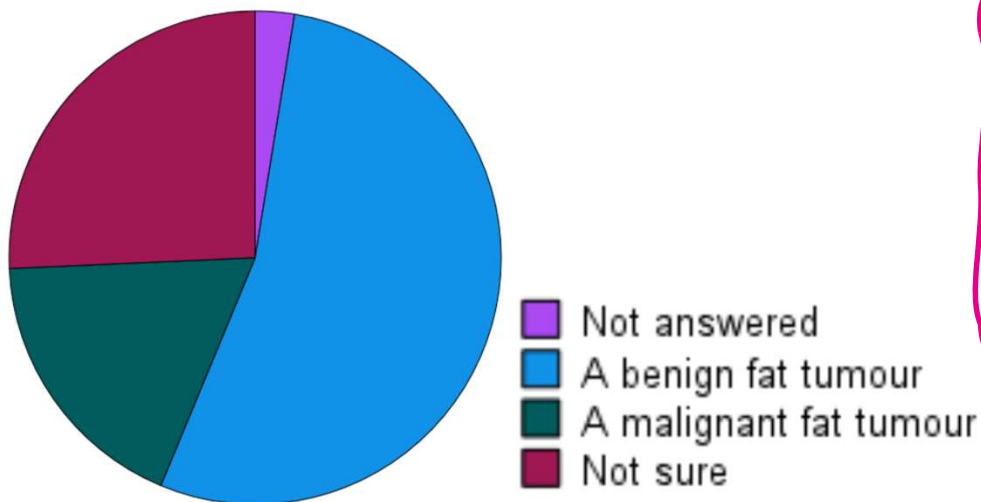
Benign tumours are rarely life threatening but they can cause serious problems because of their physical size/position.

Read about Rex at
https://www.thelighthousepeddler.com/archive-2018/2019/1/animal-care-and-welfare-lipomas-in-dogs

5. What is a lipoma?

Not answered
A benign fat tumour
A malignant fat tumour
Not sure

Most lipomas are:
• Smooth
• Round or oval in shape
• Fairly moveable
• Soft to firm
• Under the skin

Remember, lipoma always means a lump but a lump does not always mean something serious.

> A definitive diagnosis of cancer requires a biopsy or fine needle aspirate to obtain a sample of tissue for microscopic examination

FNA :

Malignant melanoma
Photo credit: Jane Ladlow

4. Which tests can be used to diagnose cancer in an animal?
(please select all that apply)

Total number of responses = n		n of 3432	Individual responses	
Biopsy or FNA	**3109**	**91%**	201	6%
Blood tests	**2600**	**76%**	13	<1%
MRI	**2266**	**66%**	9	<1%
CT scan	**2262**	**66%**	4	<1%
X-rays (radiographs)	**1891**	**55%**	6	<1%
Ultrasound	**1838**	**54%**	2	<1%
Examination	**1670**	**49%**	1	<1%
Not sure	**232**	**7%**	232	7%
Biopsy or FNA and any other			1829	53%
All 7 methods of diagnosis			1024	30%
Combinations not including biopsy/FNA			111	3%
Total number of respondents =			3432	100%

- A physical examination can detect palpable masses or enlarged lymph nodes

- A blood test alone can diagnose cancer (but can check organ function)

- X-rays, MRIs and CT scans are good for identifying metastasis/spread of cancer

- An ultrasound scan is the least sensitive method of detecting cancer

Treatment of cancer in animals is similar to treatment in people …

> **except that animals do not know they might suffer side effects and our pets tend to tolerate treatment well.**

Q6. Which cancer treatments can an animal be given?
(please select all that apply)

Total number of responses = n		n of 3344	Individual responses	
Surgery	**3075**	**92%**	118	3%
Chemotherapy	**2636**	**79%**	17	1%
Palliative care	**2400**	**60%**	2	<1%
Radiotherapy	**2023**	**39%**	3	<1%
Immunotherapy	**1306**	**72%**	0	0%
Not sure	**363**	**<0%**	368	11
None of the above	**9**	**11%**	3	<1%
All 5 treatment modalities			1055	31
Combination of ≥2 treatment modalities			1778	52
Sub-total			3344	97
Not answered			88	3
Total number of respondents =			3432	100%