

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Managing a pet cancer diagnosis is possible with right resources and support **A retired policeman's quest to improve his dog's quantity and quality of life**

[Click here to watch 8 min video interview – Bella's story](#)

As a pet owner, hearing the news that your furry companion has been diagnosed with cancer can be devastating. Retired Melbourne police officer Michael Ferdinand knows the heartbreak when his 7-year-old dog Bella was diagnosed with B cell lymphoma, a type of non-Hodgkin lymphoma that originates in the B-cell and has no cure.

In a [video interview](#) to help other pet owners navigate their pet's diagnosis, Mr Ferdinand shares his family's journey managing the cancer of their beloved Labrador – from diagnosis, prognosis and options for treatment to finding an [anti-cancer drug trial](#) that gave Bella more time with her family and quality of life that she deserved, until it was time to say goodbye.

Dr Kathleen O'Connell, specialist veterinary oncologist from Animal Referral Hospital Brisbane (QLD), notes that about 50% of dogs over the age of 10 will develop cancer¹. Also, canine lymphoma is one of the most common and aggressive types of cancer diagnosed in dogs, accounting for around 7 to 14% of all cancers diagnosed².

"B cell lymphoma is the more common type of lymphoma and comprises around 60 to 80%³ of cases seen," she says. "Symptoms can include swellings (enlarged lymph nodes), lethargy, weight loss and loss of appetite."



Michael and Bella, a few days before she passed away.

One of the most significant effects of managing a pet cancer diagnosis is the emotional toll it can take on the owners.

"Pets are often considered family members, and the thought of losing them can be distressing. Add to this the daily management of the disease, which can create feelings of overwhelm, fear and uncertainty," says Dr O'Connell. "However, managing your pet's cancer diagnosis is possible with the right resources and support for pet parents."

Bella's diagnosis was by chance

It all began when Michael took Bella down to the beach for a run, and she tore the cruciate ligament in her right back leg. She had reconstructive surgery, and a month later, their vet found lymphoma in the back of her knees and under her chin.

"Poor Bella, to go from a knee operation to lymphoma in such a short time was the worst news we could receive," says Michael. "The one positive was that if she hadn't injured her knee, she probably would not have been visiting the vet. I did not notice the lumps were there on her hind legs until the vet showed me. Her diagnosis would have been severely delayed to the point where we may have lost her in a very short amount of time."

Upon Bella's cancer diagnosis, Mr Ferdinand was referred to a veterinary oncologist who presented options to manage Bella's cancer.

Dr O'Connell explains, "Cancer treatments such as chemotherapy and radiation are highly recommended, but they can cause side effects, including fatigue, nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea.

"Currently, the mainstay of canine B cell lymphoma treatment is chemotherapy. Without further therapy, it has a very poor prognosis and survival time is short. Not every owner may opt to pursue chemo and are left looking for other options to help improve quality of life and extend survival time."

A second commonly chosen option, palliative care, means your dog may need to take steroids and may only have a short time to live.

"Palliative care may be chosen alongside a more aggressive treatment, or it may be reserved for patients when the cancer is advanced or has spread extensively, and the prognosis for long-term survival is poor," says Dr O'Connell.

"There may also be treatment limitations due to concurrent health concerns and the owner may decide that, due to incurable cancer, they want to improve quality of life and minimise side effects of treatment."

Anti-cancer drug trials also treatment option

After weighing the options, Mr Ferdinand investigated a third alternative – an anti-cancer drug trial run by biotech company PharmAust, and Bella was eligible!

Dr O'Connell is one of the vets from around Australia, New Zealand and United States evaluating the drug Monepantel (MPL) in dogs that have been newly diagnosed with B-cell lymphoma and have not started any treatment.

The 28-day drug trial includes three veterinary check-ups – at the start, at 14 days and 28 days of the trial. Although this meant Mr Ferdinand had to travel from his home in Victoria's Mornington Peninsula to the nearest trial centre in Albury, NSW, he says it was worth it for Bella to have a good quality of life.

"I looked at the *quality* of life with PharmAust's MPL trial against the *quantity* of life with chemotherapy – because chemo can give you one to two years' life extension, but it only puts cancer into remission and it will come back," he says.

"I didn't want Bella to go through the trauma of every week for 12 to 16 weeks, potentially experiencing vomiting, diarrhoea, or incontinence. On Monepantel, Bella's quality of life was as close to normal as it could be.

"Being on the trial eased my emotions quite a lot because of Bella's lack of side effects while on the drug. It would have been extremely upsetting for me to watch Bella experiencing the side effects that come while being on chemotherapy.

"I would recommend owners to take a step back once they receive their pet's diagnosis and do some research. Call other local vets for more information and see if any drug trials are available in the area. Take a day or two to consider your options, but don't take too long, as lymphoma is a quick-acting cancer."

Sadly, Bella passed away on April 6, just a few days after Mr Ferdinand finished filming [video interview](#) – Bella's legacy. You can also read Mr Ferdinand's testimonial about the drug trial [here](#).



Bella living her best life during the Monepantel anti-cancer drug trial run by PharmAust.

Managing pet cancer diagnosis requires a team effort

Ultimately, managing a pet cancer diagnosis requires a team effort, says Dr O'Connell.

"Veterinarians, pet owners and support systems must work together to ensure that pets receive the care they need. While a cancer diagnosis can be difficult, resources and support are available to help dog owners navigate this journey," she says.

"The first and most important step would be to contact their veterinarian; this can be with their local general practitioner or specialist. Both will be able to offer guidance and support by discussing their concerns.

"If owners find the process daunting, reaching out to support groups or an online community will connect them to other owners that have experienced similar challenges, which can be immensely helpful."

If an owner is struggling with their own mental health, then getting support during this time is essential.

"Therapy and counselling services can provide some people with an improved ability to deal with stress and help develop improved coping mechanisms while going through these difficult challenges," she says.

About PharmAust Monepantel anti-cancer drug trial

Working towards a successful alternative treatment for canine lymphoma, PharmAust is continuing the recruitment of pet dogs in Australia, New Zealand and the United States with untreated B cell lymphoma to finalise the evaluation of Monepantel (MPL).

MPL is already approved for veterinary use for a different indication and species, and PharmAust aims to repurpose MPL as a safe and effective cancer treatment. During Phase 2a and Phase 2b trials, Monepantel demonstrated effective anti-cancer activity and minimal side effects, which supports continued development into Phase 3 registration trials.

In Australia, participating veterinary trial centres have been set up in New South Wales, Queensland and Western Australia.

For trial eligibility, participant case studies and veterinary trial centre locations, visit www.pharmaust.com/petdogtrial

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Video credit: Phoenix Sound Studios www.phoenixsoundstudios.com

About PharmAust Limited

PharmAust (PAA) is a clinical-stage company developing targeted cancer therapeutics for both humans and animals. The company specialises in repurposing marketed drugs lowering the risks and costs of development. These efforts are supported by PAA's subsidiary, Epichem, a highly successful contract synthetic drug manufacturer which generated \$3.4 million in sales of goods & services in FY 2022.

PAA's lead drug candidate is monepantel (MPL), a novel, potent and safe inhibitor of the mTOR pathway - a key driver of cancer. MPL has been evaluated in Phase 1 clinical trials in humans and dogs. MPL treatment was well-tolerated in humans, demonstrating preliminary evidence of anticancer activity. MPL demonstrated objective anticancer activity in dogs. PAA is uniquely positioned to commercialise MPL for treatment of human and veterinary cancers as it advances the drug into Phase 2b clinical trial. To discover more, visit www.pharmaust.com

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