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ELDERLY POLAR BEAR RECEIVES CHEMOTHERAPY FOR ADVANCED-STAGE CANCER

Glacier appears to be responding well to first treatment, Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium veterinarians say

TACOMA, Wash. - TACOMA, Wash. - Glacier, a 19-year-old polar bear at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium, is moving around more and participating in some training sessions with zookeepers following a first dose of chemotherapy for advanced liver cancer, head veterinarian Dr. Karen Wolf said.



A CT scan done Friday showed the cancer has spread to Glacier's lungs and abdominal lymph nodes, Wolf said.

Zoo veterinarians and oncology specialists agree that surgery isn't an option for Glacier due to the size and nature of the tumors and the fact the cancer has spread.

They administered an intravenous injection of a chemotherapeutic drug shortly after they saw the results of the scan.

Veterinarians are hopeful the drug might slow progression of the cancer, make Glacier feel better, and prolong his life, Wolf said. But she added a note of caution: "Because individual responses vary, we don't know exactly how successful the treatment will be."

The treatment has been used in dogs, but Wolf believes it's the first time it has been used in a polar bear in the United States. It's warranted for Glacier because his tumors are inoperable, she added.

Zookeepers and veterinary staff are closely monitoring Glacier's condition and administering pain medications, antibiotics and other medicine as needed. Animals react differently to chemotherapy than humans, Wolf said. Glacier has exhibited no ill effects from his first treatment.

Staff will administer a second IV chemotherapy treatment in a few weeks

A physical exam performed on Glacier in February revealed that he has heart disease and a large tumor.

The bear continues to go on and off exhibit in the zoo's Arctic Tundra area as his condition permits.

Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium has two other polar bears, 29-year-old Boris, and 19-year-old Blizzard.

Blizzard and Glacier came to the zoo as 15-month-old orphans in 1997.

Polar bears are listed as a vulnerable species by the International Union for Conservation of Nature, or IUCN. The median life expectancy for a male polar bear in the wild is 20.7 years, according to statistics from the Association of Zoos & Aquariums.

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Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium, the Northwest's only combined zoo and aquarium, promotes responsible stewardship of the world's resources through education, conservation, research and recreational opportunities. The zoo, a division of Metro Parks Tacoma, is accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA) and the Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquariums (AMMPA).