

Cytarabine (Cytosar[®])

by Dr. Carrie Journey DVM, DACVIM (Neurology)

SUMMARY:

- 1) Cytarabine is a chemotherapeutic agent that is used in some forms of cancer as well as inflammatory brain disease.
- 2) Pregnant women, immunocompromised people and small children should not come in contact with your pet's urine for three days after treatment. If your pet has an accident during this period, wear gloves to clean up the accident and wash your hands immediately afterwards.
- 3) This medication rarely causes side effects. However low red and white blood cell counts, as well as vomiting and diarrhea rarely occur.

EXPLANATION:

This medication is an injection that can be given intravenously or under the skin. It is commonly used in inflammatory disease (ie GME, necrotizing encephalitis), but is also used in some forms of cancer (such as lymphoma).

For inflammatory disease our goal is to gradually space out the cytarabine treatment cycles over time. In general, Dr. Journey recommends starting with an every 4 week protocol. Every 3rd treatment cycle we space out the treatment by two weeks. So for instance, in the beginning, we would have three treatments at 4 weeks apart. Then if your pet is doing well we will go to three treatments at 6 weeks apart. Then if your pet is still doing well we then go to three treatment 8 weeks apart. We will generally go for a period of 12 total treatments before discussing weaning off this medication. Some pets require lifelong treatment with this medication.

If your pet is being treated for cancer, your veterinarian will discuss a treatment schedule.

For each treatment your pet will need to come to the hospital two days in a row. The first appointment will take about 30 minutes because we need to run blood work. The second appointment will be much quicker as we just need to give the injection. If you would like, we can likely board your pet overnight for these treatments.

MONITORING:

A complete blood count is recommended before each series of this medication. For the first few treatments we also recommend a blood count 7 to 10 days after the treatment. Your pet should also have general blood work at least twice yearly while on this medication.

SIDE EFFECTS:

This medication seems to be very well tolerated overall. The following side effects have been reported.

- 1) GI side effects including inappetence, vomiting and diarrhea
- 2) Rarely it can cause red cell, white blood cell and platelet counts to be low.
- 3) Other reported side effects include eye irritation, oral ulcers, neurotoxicity and liver toxicity, but these happen very rarely in veterinary medicine.



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SPECIAL PRECAUTIONS

- 1) Pregnant women, small children and immunocompromised people should not have contact with the pet for three days following treatment.
- 2) Please wear gloves and wash hands immediately after cleaning up urinary accidents for three days following therapy.

