In October 2014, my veterinarian husband noticed a swelling on the left side of our sweet, old golden retriever’s face. Emme showed no outward sign of pain or discomfort and, being a golden, kept her great attitude and appetite. **Maybe it’s nothing serious,** we reassured ourselves as we proceeded with the diagnostics and removal of the mass we located on her gum line. The histopathology results were devastating. Emme had a malignant melanoma.

As a reader of this journal, you know the score. Historically, in both humans and dogs, these tumors are hardly affected by chemotherapy. Surgery and radiation help debulk the main tumor but do not stop progression. Average survival time for a human with advanced malignant melanoma is less than a year. In dogs, it’s about 4 months. Luckily for us, because of a chance meeting between a veterinary and a human oncologist at a social event, history is changing. Phil Bergman, DVM, told a surprised Jedd Wolchok, MD, that yes, dogs do get malignant melanoma. That sparked a collaboration and research study that ultimately led to a DNA-based melanoma vaccine. Released by Merial in 2009, Oncept™, a human DNA-based vaccine for dogs, was an option for Emme. We started her treatment as soon as possible.

Well over a year after that dreadful diagnosis, our old girl is still with us and going strong. She is asymptomatic, happy, and playful, thanks to the vaccine created jointly by physicians and veterinarians. Such a wonderful outcome makes me aware of how much more may be possible at the intersection of animal and human medicine. When professionals start to talk to each other and exchange ideas, new possibilities could open up for all species. Clinical trials, which are so hard to accomplish in humans, could be done with real pets that experience environments identical to those of humans with the same disease. Findings of long-term health studies, such as the 50-year Framingham Heart Study in nurses, could be enhanced and expanded on by lifetime studies in a shorter-lived species, such as dogs.

The Zoobiquity concept is taking off, and some of us think it’s long overdue. Join in when you can. Read the book, look to see if one of the nationwide Zoobiquity conferences is happening near you, and talk to your fellow human professionals. Maybe the pediatric nurse you know has some insights that will help with your patients. Maybe it’s the other way around. Perhaps insights into your clients’ questions about diseases you both see, like ringworm or Lyme disease, will help you both be better health educators. You never know what can happen. I just know that my husband, I, and Emme are happy that it did.

Do you have a story you’d like to share? Write me at ljohnson@navc.com.