



3 READING

Preview the questions in Reading Check Part A on page 44. Then read the story.

Animal Detectives



Oscar the cat

- 1 Millions of people have dogs and cats as pets. Dogs also help some people who need assistance in daily living. Dogs guide the blind¹ and act as ears for the deaf. Now, recent stories in the news say that dogs and cats can also help doctors.
- 2 Oscar the cat lives in a nursing home, where people stay when they need special care when they are very ill or at the end of their lives. Cats, small dogs, and birds are often kept as pets in nursing homes. They entertain people and provide friendship. However, Oscar is different from the normal nursing home pet.
- 3 Every day, Oscar walks in and out of the patients' rooms. The nurses say that he "does the rounds"² just like a doctor. He looks at each patient and sniffs. Then he usually leaves the room. However, when Oscar decides to stay and gets on the bed next to the patient, the nurses call the doctor and the patient's family. According to the nurses, Oscar has accurately predicted the death of 25 patients so far.

¹ the blind: people who are not able to see

² do the rounds: visit all the patients regularly

Oscar's story is just that – a story. No one has done research to find out how accurate Oscar the cat really is. There may be a different reason Oscar stays in the rooms of people who are going to die. However, two research studies have found other examples of animals that help doctors. These studies found that some dogs can detect cancer.

4

In the first study, cancer patients breathed into tubes.³ Scientists then trained five dogs to sit or lie down when they smelled the breath samples with cancer. Next came the real test. The dogs smelled more than 150 different breath samples from both healthy patients and patients with cancer. One dog was 97 percent accurate in identifying the 86 samples of people with cancer. Even the dog with the lowest score identified 88 percent of the cancer samples.

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In the second study, several dogs identified a sample that the researchers thought was cancer-free. The researchers sent it back for more lab tests. This time, the tests showed that the sample actually did show signs of cancer. The dogs identified cancer that the first tests missed!

6

These research results do not surprise many pet owners. A dog named Trudi kept sniffing at her owner's leg. The owner went to the doctor, who found that the man had melanoma. This is a form of skin cancer that can be deadly. The dog identified it early, before it spread.⁴ Another patient was treated for cancer, but her dog kept sniffing and making noises at the cancer site. The doctor had not removed all the cancer. Once again, a dog identified its owner's cancer.

7

What makes dogs a species of animal that is so good at detecting cancer? Diseases such as cancer produce smells. Dogs can smell as much as 10,000 times better than people, and much more of the dog's brain is related to the sense of smell. Smelling things is a large part of a dog's life.

8

Will a visit to the doctor soon include a sniff from a friendly animal? Some people think this is not a bad idea. It is less expensive than a lab test, and it doesn't hurt! Pet owners: Pay attention when your dog or cat starts acting differently.

9

³ *tube*: a small, narrow container that scientists use

⁴ *spread*: moved to another place