

Philadelphia family starts a canine cancer research fund at Penn Vet

Miso was diagnosed with clear cell carcinoma in January. Her owners hope to help others dealing with canine cancer.



Miso Harris with her family, Joy and Michael Harris
Michael Harris



by **Punya Bhasin**

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A Philadelphia family has started a research fund for canine cancer at Penn Vet in honor of their beloved cocker spaniel, Miso.

Miso was diagnosed with [clear cell carcinoma](#), a rare cancer with very few treatments, in January. Miso was given about three months left to live, according to her veterinarians, but has survived months longer.

As Miso enjoys her final days, her owners of nearly 13 years, Joy and Michael Harris of Queen Village, said they wanted to do something in the dog's honor.

“We know it's too late to help Miso, but we also try to help others and obviously seeing the bigger picture is difficult in times of intense emotions, but we're trying to turn sadness into something that's helpful for others,” Michael Harris said.

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Joy Harris said they started the [Miso Harris Research Fund](#) to help create more opportunities and funds for canine cancer treatments and cures, so that other beloved pets can hopefully overcome the disease.

“We all know someone that's been impacted by cancer, it's a horrible disease, so anything that we can collectively do to try to find some sort of a cure is obviously the primary objective of the fund,” Joy Harris said. “We just want to help ensure that other dogs won't have to endure what we saw Miso battle over the last several months.”

A team of six veterinary oncologists will be leading the canine cancer clinical research at the Comprehensive Cancer Care service at Penn Vet: Matthew Atherton, Jennifer Lenz, Pascale Salah, Maureen Griffin, Jennifer Huck, and Lilian Duda.

The Harrises' friends and family have contributed \$20,000 to the fundraising efforts, and they hope to raise even more to further fund canine cancer research.

Lenz, a veterinary oncologist who was on Miso's health-care team and will be overseeing parts of the research, said the money will go a long way in understanding canine cancer and creating better treatments and therapies. Lenz said studies show that about 4.2 million dogs are diagnosed with cancer each year in the United States, and she believes the Miso Harris fund will have wide-reaching treatment applications and impact.

"It's really nice that we have this donation because it gives us the opportunity

as a department to work together collaboratively and figure out what's the best way to spend the most money and where is the biggest impact that we can have," Lenz said.

Michael Harris, who along with Joy adopted Miso when she was a puppy in September 2010, said they chose Penn Vet to direct the funds, because they were appreciative of the care the doctors there provided Miso, and wanted to provide funds for the doctors to continue their research.

"We chose Penn to establish this fund because of the incredible care they've provided Miso, not only during her battle with cancer, but throughout her entire life," Michael Harris said. "Obviously we want the fund to ultimately be as impactful as possible, and we believe Penn presents the best chance for that to happen."

Joy Harris said she hopes others hear Miso's story and donate to the fund to combat canine cancer, a cause they think Miso would be proud of as they cherish their final days with her.

"We're just trying to go day to day and enjoying the moments we have with her, recognizing time is short and appreciating every day that we get with her," Joy Harris said.