

FT BIG READ - SOCIAL MEDIA

# Challenging the jihadi narrative

By Madhumita Murgia and Hannah Kuchler

On a sweltering September afternoon in a packed auditorium at Kingston College in south-west London, Humza Arshad is holding a crowd of more than 100 teenagers spellbound. Wearing a padded jacket and a woolly hat despite the heat, he tells the students that he has come to talk about radicalization and extremism - "a light topic for a Thursday afternoon", he jokes.

About a quarter of the audience raise their hands when asked if they are Muslim; all seem transfixed by the speaker, best known for playing a hapless south London Asian immigrant on his YouTube series *Diary of a Badman*.

Mr Arshad, 31, starts with a bit of dark humour, pointing to a photo of gun-toting terrorists - and then reeling off the names of his cousins. Next, the face of a 15-year-old Bangladeshi girl in a hijab fills the screen and a murmur ripples across the room. Some recognize her as Shamima Begum, the straight-A student from east London who left her home in February last year bound for Syria. Shamima and her two friends, labeled the "jihadi brides" by the tabloids, ended up in Raqqa, an Isis stronghold. They have never returned.

"No one would ever have thought something like that would happen to them and it made me realize that if it can happen to a family like that, it can happen to anyone," he tells the crowd. "Imagine if this was your sister or best friend and she disappears."

Mr Arshad is one of a growing group of digital media stars who use YouTube videos, Facebook posts, tweets, photos and standup comedy to counter the barrage of extremist propaganda online - particularly from social media-savvy terrorist groups such as Isis. His YouTube series, which tackles issues facing Muslim youth in London, has been watched more than 73m times. One video, "I'm a Muslim, not a terrorist" has been screened in

BLOOMBERG



**Tech companies have faced attacks from critics for what they see as their failure to effectively monitor and remove terrorist content**

more than 100 schools around the UK by the police.

"A lot of girls were being brainwashed by these guys online, on Facebook and Twitter, so I had to do something," Mr Arshad says.

Muslim content creators like Mr Arshad have been embraced by Google, Facebook and other tech companies, which have faced attacks from critics for what they see as their failure to effectively monitor and remove terrorist content. A report published in August by the UK parliament's home affairs committee accused tech groups of "undermining" counter-terrorism investigations by refusing to hand over potential evidence.

This embrace of so-called counter-speech goes beyond Silicon Valley: after seeing limited success with their own propaganda efforts, the US departments of justice and homeland security, the European Commission and the British government are all recruiting documentary filmmakers and university students to produce compelling, shareable content to battle the jihadi message. The US state department also this year launched the Global Engagement Center to counter Isis propaganda.

The Isis social media machine appears to have been diminished since mid-2015, but its presence on Twitter, YouTube and other sites has been the terrorist group's most powerful tool of

persuasion, particularly in Europe and the UK. It has a 24/7 media wing, with five official video production houses. "Many say if it were not for the internet there would be no Islamic State," says Yasmin Green, head of research and development at Jigsaw, Google's think-tank that has been analyzing radicalisation online.

While social media companies are keen to promote their efforts in this area, its effectiveness in preventing terrorism is unproven. "It would be fair to say we are in a primitive stage. It's fantastic that Facebook or Google are sponsoring one or two projects, but that doesn't give you enough data to make viable statements about whether counter-speech works or not," says Professor Peter Neumann, founder and director of the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence in London.

In particular, it is unlikely to change the behaviour of hardcore converts. "If someone has made up his or her mind and you

then try to counter their view, it could produce a response known as reactance - actually causing them to become even more resolute in their opinions because

**"I'm not a politician, I don't want to pick a side. I just wanted kids to stop blowing themselves up."**

HUMZA ARSHAD

you are challenging their beliefs," Prof Neumann says.

"So it's not about counter-speech being good or bad, it has to be aimed at people in a particular stage of their deci- ▶▶



## Challenging the jihadi narrative (continued)

sion-making. It has to be easy for these people to search out when they are googling different points of view.”

Until now, taking down objectionable content has been the primary weapon in the battle against online extremism. Social media groups' complete control of user accounts means even governments are dependent on them to respond to urgent requests.

The major social platforms all rely on users to report inappropriate content, although Facebook and Google say they proactively take down accounts associated with known terrorists.

“When we become aware of an account supporting terrorism, we look at their friends, and associated accounts, so we can remove them,” says Monika Bickert, head of public policy at Facebook.

Twitter announced in mid-August that it had suspended 360,000 terror-inciting accounts since mid-2015, with the number of daily suspensions up 80 per cent. Account suspensions also rose in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks in Brussels in March and Nice in July.

But experts believe this is merely a temporary disruption to the extremists' efforts. In many cases when radical accounts are taken down, they either migrate to encrypted sites like Telegram or WhatsApp, or pop up with new accounts on the same sites. On Twitter, Isis propagandists openly boast about their 30th and 40th Twitter handles. “You can disrupt extremists and divert them, but you can't censor your way out of that conundrum,” says Prof Neumann. “It's an incomplete and ultimately ineffec-



## The Isis media operation publishes video and audio files, religious treatises and magazines every week

tive strategy.”

The UK parliament's home affairs committee went further in its report, accusing social media groups of “consciously failing” to prevent their sites from being used for terrorist propaganda. The committee's members said it was “alarming” that the tech companies have only a few hundred employees monitoring networks with billions of accounts.

The Isis media operation publishes video and audio files, re-

ligious treatises and magazines every week, according to Zahed Amanullah, head of counter narratives at the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, a London think-tank.

“More importantly, the messaging is so well-designed: they have German expats speaking to Germans, British foreign fighters recruiting their peers. They have reach that they have never had before,” Mr Amanullah says. “The migration of foreign fight-

ers from Europe and Britain is a direct result of the sophistication of this propaganda.”

Sensing that they were losing the propaganda war, business leaders from Silicon Valley, Madison Avenue and Hollywood gathered at the US justice department in February to watch and learn from Isis' videos.

The executives were not shown the videos of beheadings and burnings, but the sophisticated soft-focus marketing deployed by Isis to recruit young western Muslims. Designed to be shared on social media, the videos show Isis members giving treats to children - candy floss is handed out in videos targeted at Americans and Nutella in those hoping to lure Europeans. John Carlin, assistant attorney-general at the DoJ, appealed to content creators for help. “The most creative minds came up with this technology,” he said. “Can you think up a way to stop this appalling nihilist group from doing this?”

Facebook invested €1m in a Berlin-based initiative in partnership with the ISD to spur creativity in this area, and Google has held eight counter-speech workshops this year on how to make compelling YouTube videos. Twitter has worked with the UK's Media Diversity Institute to develop a guide on how to challenge hateful views.

Another initiative has been developed by EdVenture Partners, a non-profit organisation. It runs a counter-speech competition in 150 universities around the world. Since its launch, 130,000 students from Afghanistan and Istanbul to the Netherlands have competed to design the most creative and effective counter-speech campaign, ranging from hashtags to short videos.

One campaign by a team of Afghan students called “Islam says

no to extremism” reached more than 5m people on Facebook alone.

One of YouTube's earliest offerings, an animated series starring a fictional working-class Londoner called Abdullah-X, was put together by a former Islamist extremist and animator, who asked not to be named. Abdullah-X is not targeted at a general audience, like Mr Arshad's satirical comedy, but aimed squarely at people sympathetic to extremism.

One video, “Five Considerations for a Muslim on Syria”, uploaded in March 2014, hit a nerve. “Within six weeks, we reached 50,000 people in our target audience, people literally typing ‘I want to go to Syria’ in Google search got the video in front of them,” says Mr Amanullah of the ISD, which has worked on the Abdullah-X project.

Isis operatives issued an explicit 5,000-word line-by-line rebuttal, including arguments supporting the need for violence. “Islam is a tradition of jihad . . . and there will not cease to be jihad until the day of judgment,” it said.

For Mr Amanullah, the response was a sign that the message was working. “It got under their skin,” he says.

The Jigsaw pilot programme targeted vulnerable people by their search history, showing them ads on Google that led to a curated playlist of Arabic- and English-language YouTube channels. The clips include stories from ordinary people about the reality of life under Isis, and a soldier's first-hand narrative of what it was like to fight.

“I realized I had been sent to my death by Isis,” a former fighter says in a video. “I was a victim. Apart from many other things I feel deceived.”

More than 300,000 people watched the videos within two months. The playlists were clicked on almost four times more frequently than a regular ad campaign. Viewers watched more than 1.5m minutes of the videos. “That suggests a significant impact,” says Ms Green.

Social media companies clearly have an incentive to promote counter-speech: governments are threatening the very openness that their users treasure, unless they are seen to be fighting terrorism on their platforms. But individuals such as Mr Arshad - the people governments and social media groups hope can be the drivers of counter-speech online - do not come with a bigger agenda.

“I'm not a politician, I don't want to pick a side,” Mr Arshad says after the Kingston College show. “I just wanted kids to stop blowing themselves up.”

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## TECHNOLOGY

# The web tool to make the extremists think twice

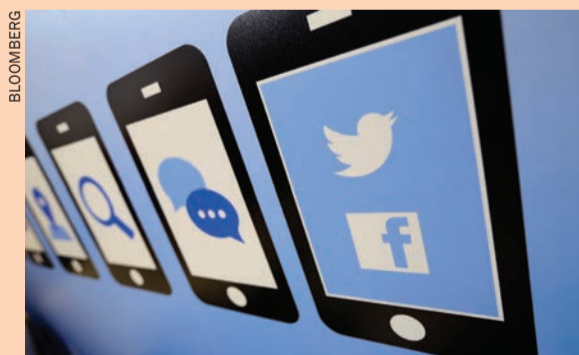
Western governments have criticized social media platforms including Facebook, YouTube and Twitter for being slow to stop the spread of terrorist material. But few critics have as much technical expertise as Hany Farid, a professor of computer science at Dartmouth College in the US. Mr Farid developed an algorithm to detect child pornography, work that is being adapted to curb the proliferation of terrorist videos.

“Consciously, [the tech companies] know what is happening on their networks. They are not dumb,” he says. “They are choosing to not do something about it.”

Prof Farid is planning to launch a new technology alongside the Counter Extremism Project, a US non-profit organisation, to help online platforms identify extremist content and take it down in an instant.

The group hopes the National Office for Reporting Extremism will eliminate the worst of the content and make it harder for terrorists to circulate videos.

The new technology analyses images and sounds to create digital signatures that can be followed and found around the web. A watermark is attached to part of the digital backbone of the video or audio, such



as the pixels or a waveform, so that even if they are cropped, annotated or have the colors changed, they can still be identified quickly. Facebook and Twitter feeds can be analyzed as they are produced and flagged to the companies to remove.

Mark Wallace, chief executive of the CEP, hopes the technology will eliminate the worst content and put “the next Jihadi John” off making videos if they are much harder to spread.

He says: “Maybe with this technology that person thinks twice because he knows that the video is going to be taken down off every social media platform.”



By Andrey Biryukov

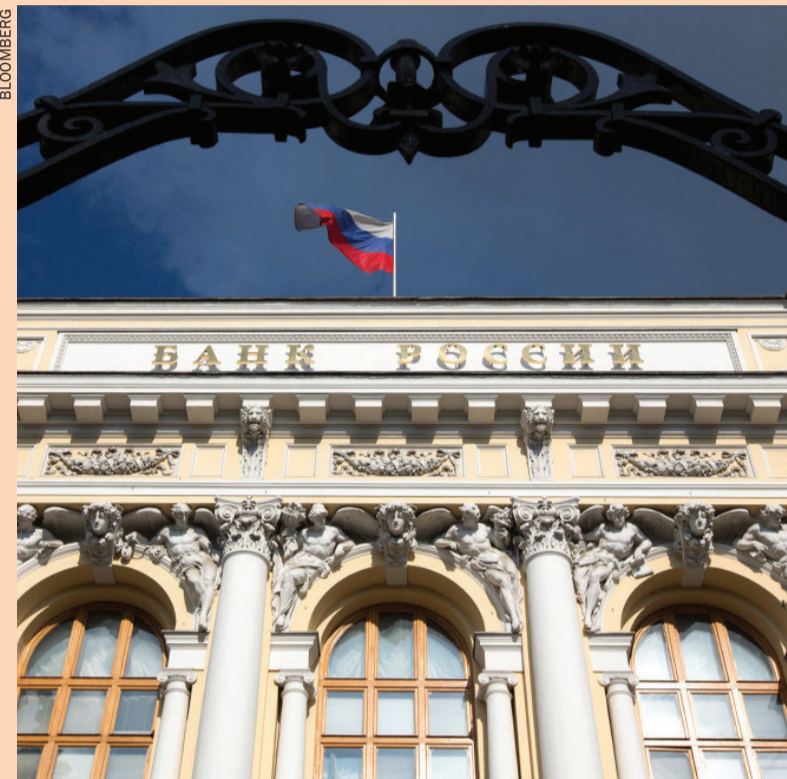
# Incredible shrinking middle class vexes Russian central bank

**T**HE Bank of Russia is discovering yet another downside to how little is left of the country's middle class.

The central bank has warned that its ability to steer inflation is at risk from growing wealth inequality and the disappearance of the middle-income households that are the most sensitive to interest rates and prices. Earnings and domestic demand are still withering at a pace unprecedented under President Vladimir Putin. Data due Wednesday will show retail sales dropped in September for a record 21st month, while real disposable incomes tumbled an annual 7 percent, according to the median estimates in Bloomberg surveys.

Consumption has been obliterated as wages couldn't keep up with the surging cost of living. That's pushed 14 million Russians - a population bigger than Illinois - out of the middle class since the economic slump started two years ago, according to Sberbank CIB's latest survey of shoppers. The downfall of a group that rose to prosperity during the oil boom marks a historic reversal after it doubled in size under Putin. Many of them now rely on government programs to complement their dwindling incomes and have become more vulnerable to changes in fiscal policy.

"The decline of the middle class is bad for control over inflation, because risks from fiscal policy are higher," said Oleg Kouzmin, a former central bank adviser who's now chief economist for Russia at Renaissance Capital in Moscow. "Demand will be more sensitive to budget decisions"



Russia's central bank

since any assistance will have an immediate effect by touching off spending by poorer households, he said.

While the widening rich-poor divide crimps consumption, and the International Monetary Fund has found that avoiding the "hollowing-out" of the middle class benefits economic growth, the impact of income polarization on central bank policy is less obvious.

Deeper social inequality weakens the price elasticity of demand and complicates the task of controlling inflation, ac-

ording to the Bank of Russia. Less-well-off families, usually without savings and little access to loans, spend primarily on basic necessities and hardly react at all to changes in interest rates, it said. Wealthier households, on the other hand, are unresponsive because they spend such a small share of their incomes on staples.

"Middle-income families are the most sensitive to changes in interest rates and consumer prices, which in turn encourages producers to adjust to changes in their demand," the central

bank said in its draft guidelines for 2017-2019. "Economic policy that promotes a more even distribution of incomes in society will create the conditions not only for balanced development and social stability but will also enhance the effectiveness of signals from monetary policy."

Risks already abound for the central bank. Its credibility is on the line after price growth overshoot forecasts for a fourth consecutive year in 2015. Policy makers, concerned they won't deliver on their 4 percent inflation target by end-2017, have pledged to keep rates on hold through the rest of the year after reducing their benchmark to 10 percent in two steps in 2016.

Putin ushered in an era of affluence before a conflict in neighboring Ukraine erupted in 2014 and oil prices collapsed, stoking the country's worst currency crisis since the government's debt default in 1998.

Between 2000 and 2013, the middle class - defined as those with per capita consumption equal to or above \$10 a day - doubled to more than 60 percent of the population, according to the World Bank. The lender estimates that by 2010, the middle class controlled 74 percent of total household income and 86 percent of consumption.

Sberbank CIB's survey of the "the Ivanovs," using a common last name to describe the typical shopper, found that the share of Russians who consider themself-

ves middle class was at 51 percent last quarter, down from 61 percent two years earlier. As wages fall in line with inflation, the middle class is unlikely to shrink further, according to the investment-banking arm of Russia's biggest lender.

Yet its proportion may already be less, said Igor Polyakov, an analyst at the Center for Macroeconomic Analysis and Short-Term Forecasting in Moscow, who puts the share at as low as 32 percent, down from about 40 percent in 2014. The middle class is set to contract in 2017-2018 and won't start to recover until the following two years, he said.

A poll by the state-run All-Russia Center for the Study of Public Opinion released on Wednesday showed that 60 percent of respondents believe it's not a good time to make large purchases and 80 percent say the same is true of taking out loans. Sixty-one percent of Russians think that right now, it's best to spend at little money as possible and save for the future instead, according to the Sept. 24-25 survey of 1,600 people, which had a margin of error of no more than 3.5 percentage points.

"A shift to a savings-oriented model won't soon result in greater confidence in the future," Polyakov said. "Because of the contraction in the middle class, there's no reason to expect a rebound in sales of costlier goods."

**Bloomberg**

ADELSON INVESTS USD650M IN THE STADIUM PROJECT

## Will Vegas and Raiders be a match?

**A**S much as Oakland Raiders owner Mark Davis wishes otherwise, a decision on allowing him to move his franchise to Las Vegas isn't likely to come anytime soon.

That's not to say it won't happen. Several team owners are ready to support the relocation if the right pieces fall into place - and we're not talking roulette wheels.

"I'm pleased they've made as much progress as they have," Texans owner Robert McNair said last week at the league's fall meetings, when Davis made a short presentation to the membership. "We'll look at it when it is finally presented in total. These

things are still so fluid, until they nail everything down we don't know what we're looking at. We'll wait until we have a full package."

It's critical to Davis - and Las Vegas - that the full package is persuasive enough to overcome some of the debits of the move. There's the downsizing from the Bay Area, one of America's prime marketplaces, to much smaller Vegas. There's the abandoning of Oakland for the second time by the franchise, and this time when the region has shown tremendous growth.

There are questions about the involvement of casino owner Shel-

don Adelson, who is putting USD650 million toward the \$1.9 billion domed stadium project. How big will his role be? How involved with the Raiders does he want his casino to be?

And, of course, there's the unavoidable topic of gambling. "From my perspective, there clearly are shifts in society and the way people view gambling and the way you view even lotteries," NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell said. "There have been shifts in that and we obviously monitor that. But we still remain very much opposed to legalized gambling on sports, and we think that has an

impact on the integrity of our game, and that's what we watch. Whether people gamble or not is not necessarily our particular focus.

"What we want to do is make sure we're doing what's right for the game, and for the NFL, and that's where our focus will remain."

Over the next two months or so, the league will conduct studies of Las Vegas as a potential team home. The Raiders can apply for relocation in January, though Davis has said the team will play the next two seasons in Oakland, fulfilling two one-year lease options. The target, fluid as it is, would

be to call the desert home in 2019 at the earliest.

There are scenarios, of course, in which the Raiders could wind up in Los Angeles as the second tenant in the Rams' new facility in Inglewood, or they would have to wait yet another year to know where they might head.

Should the Chargers vacate San Diego for L.A. - much depends on next month's stadium referendum there - the Southern California option disappears for Davis. But there's also a chance the Chargers could seek a one-year delay on their decision, something three-quarters of the 32 NFL owners would need to approve.

Still, Davis' pursuit of Las Vegas, and the city's wooing of him, will continue unabated - bar-

ring a last-ditch effort by Oakland to make a proposal that works for the Raiders and the league.

"Oakland was in the driver's seat if they could've put together anything," Davis said. "They came up with nothing. Las Vegas has already done what it is supposed to do and we have to bring it up to the National Football League and get permission to move to Las Vegas."

The other owners are listening. "I have an open mind," Giants owner John Mara said. "There's a lot more work to be done. Where the land is (for the stadium), what the public money is, where are we with Oakland? Market studies need to be done. "They made a good presentation," Mara added of the Raiders, "but we're a long ways from a determination." **AP**



## INDIA

# Phone app launched to monitor New Delhi's pollution

INDIA'S capital, laboring under the label of being the world's most polluted city, is trying something new to help clean up its air.

A smartphone application that allows residents to report the presence of construction dust or the burning of leaves and garbage in New Delhi's public parks to authorities was launched Friday.

The "Hawa Badlo," or "Change the Air," app has two versions. One allows people to take pictures of likely pollutants. The other allows authorities to investigate and act on valid complaints.

Over the last few years, New Delhi has struggled with ways to handle the pollution, which becomes especially obvious during the colder winter months as the city's air turns to a gray haze.

The newest measure, the phone app, was launched by the Environmental Pollution (Prevention and Control) Authority, a monitoring group set up on the order of India's Supreme Court in April.



Over the last decade or so, India, like neighboring China, has seen pollution spiral as its economy has boomed and it has continued to rely on burning coal to generate electricity. The number of vehicles on the road has skyrocketed, while hundreds of millions of impoverished people still use wood, kerosene or whatever they can grab at the garbage dump to build fires for cooking or keeping warm on winter nights.

Over the last two years, the

government has tried a slew of measures to control the air pollution, including stricter emission norms for cars and a tax on diesel-fueled trucks that enter the city.

New Delhi also has attempted to limit the number of cars during the winter months, when the air quality is at its worst. Twice the city had a two-week period in which cars were allowed on the roads only on even or odd days, depending on the vehicle's license plate number. AP

## 21 Brazilian, foreign mining executives charged in dam burst

PROSECUTORS charged 21 Brazilian and foreign mining executives with manslaughter and various environmental crimes last week, nearly a year after a mine dam burst killed 19 people and polluted hundreds of miles of rivers and streams.

The Attorney General's Office in the state of Minas Gerais said those charged are mostly Brazilians and also include American, Australian and British board members and directors at the Brazilian mining companies Samarco and Vale, and Australia's BHP Billiton.

Samarco is a joint venture of the two larger companies. Former CEO Ricardo Vescovi, current COO Kleber Luiz de Mendonca and others are accused of causing what many call South American nation's worst environmental disaster. All three companies issued statements denying the charges.

Federal prosecutor Jose Adercio Leite Sampaio alleged that experts told executives, board members and other company officials that the basin of mine dump could burst, but they cho-

se to ignore the danger and continue extracting from the rich iron ore deposit to compensate for falling commodities prices.

"They deliberately prioritized money over safety," Sampaio said in a news conference. "They knew there were problems and did not make the decisions that could have improved safety."

Sampaio said the operation had no emergency protocol to protect villages downstream from the dam.

When the dam ruptured it flooded the area with some 40 million cubic meters of waste, and prosecutors also filed environmental charges related to the death of animal life.

Prosecutors said they found an internal company document from the breach that estimated such an accident could cause 20 deaths and serious environmental damage and interrupt business for up to two years.

In a statement, Samarco, which is also appealing seven fines handed down by the Environment Ministry, insisted the companies did not know the dam was in danger of collapsing. AP

### ASK THE VET

By Dr Ruan Du Toit Bester



## CANINE LUNG CANCER TREATMENT

Over the past few years, there have been several advancements in lung cancer treatment for dogs. Lung cancer has become common among dogs as more canines are being diagnosed with lung cancer each day. Lung cancer in general is of two types namely, primary and secondary lung cancer. Cancer that originates in the lungs is called primary lung cancer while cancer that originates elsewhere and spreads to the lungs is called secondary lung cancer. Secondary lung cancer is the most commonly occurring form while primary lung cancer is very rare.

The most important aspect in the treatment of cancer is to prevent the cancerous cells from spreading to the other parts of the body. Like any other form of cancer, there are three options for lung cancer treatment in dogs.

#### TREATMENT OPTIONS FOR CANINE LUNG CANCER

Canine Lung Cancer treatment includes:  
Surgery  
Radiation therapy  
Chemotherapy

#### FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE TREATMENT OPTIONS

All the three methods of treatment control the spread of the cancerous cells and help to prolong the life of your pet. The method of treatment depends on factors

such as the age, the size and the breed of the dog as well as the progression of the cancer.

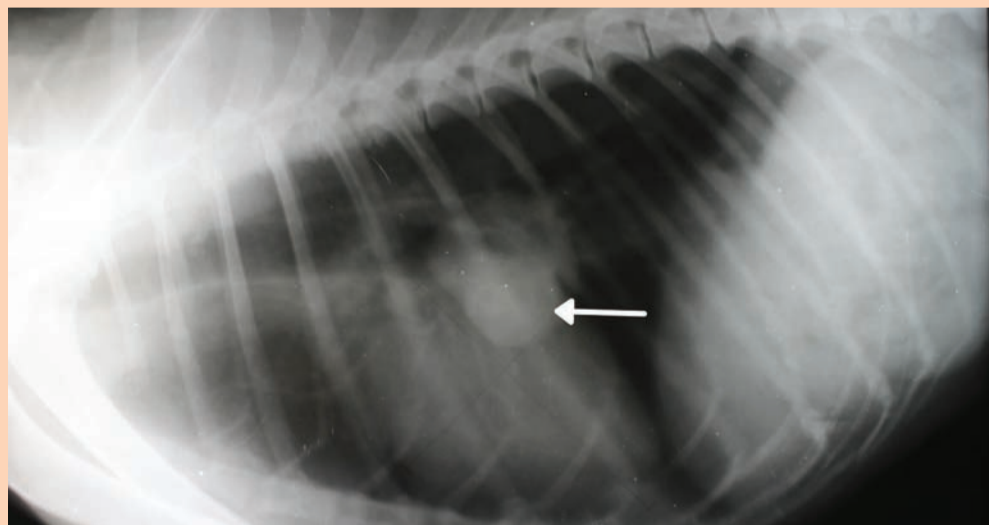
#### SURGERY FOR CANINE LUNG CANCER

Surgery is always the primary method of treatment for any form of cancer. However, the size and location of the tumor are two main factors that are taken into consideration before going ahead with surgery. When the cancer is small and is located in only in one area, surgery is the best option as it would help to remove the cancerous mass cells completely from your pet's body.

If the size of the tumor increases and if the tumor is present in more than one place, surgery is not recommended as complete removal of the tumor won't be possible.

#### CHEMOTHERAPY FOR DOGS SUFFERING FROM LUNG CANCER

Chemotherapy is used both as a primary as well as a secondary method of lung cancer treatment. In chronic cases where the cancer has spread to other parts of the body of the pet or grown large in size, chemotherapy is used as the primary method of treatment. Chemotherapy is also used as a secondary method of treatment after surgery and it has shown promising results to control the spread of the cancer.



Radiation Therapy for Dog Lung Cancer  
Radiation therapy is not commonly used for lung cancer treatment in dogs and this is because of the proximity of the heart to the lungs. Hence the harmful radiation might have an undesirable effect on the heart of the pet. Moreover, radiation therapy is also the costliest of the three methods. However, it has been used in some cases and it has shown desirable results.

#### NATURAL REMEDIES TO PREVENT THE SPREAD OF CANCER

Though natural remedies such as herbs cannot prevent the spread of cancer, they could help to boost the immune system of the pet and thereby prolong his lifespan. The bugwig diet which consists of flaxseed oil and cottage cheese has proven to improve the immune system of pets during cancer. Natural supplements could also be

added to the pet's diet. However, it's advisable to obtain the consent of the vet before taking such measures.

Lung cancer is fatal and the different methods of treatment are used to prolong the lifespan of your dog. In addition to treatment it is the duty of the pet owner to make sure that the pet has a peaceful and comfortable life, free from discomfort and pain.

Hope this info helps  
Till next week  
Dr Ruan

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