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*Effects of Dietary Habits and Environmental Conditions on Health Factors in Golden Retrievers*

Cancer is the most common and primary cause of death of American golden retrievers. The Morris Animal Foundation is currently doing a study to identify risk factors for development of cancer and other diseases in golden retrievers. For this, the research framework is critical since the information gathered needs to be all encompassing, sourced from owners, veterinarians and laboratories. Establishing the framework and methodology involved a clear understanding of the data requirements for the research, the associated sources (owners, veterinarians etc.) and development of the process (sampling etc.) to obtain the information. Willing owners of Golden Retriever puppies between the ages of 6 months to 2 years have enrolled and continue to enroll their puppies in this study and agree to participate in it for the life of the dog. The owners then go to a select set of veterinarians for an annual examination where samples of the dogs' blood, urine, feces, hair and toenail clippings are collected. The owners and veterinarians then fill out online questionnaires about the dogs' nutrition, environment, behavior and health.

I was able to obtain a significant amount of data from the golden retrievers registered in the pilot study. Obesity is an extremely common problem with golden retrievers, and so is hypothyroidism. Thyroid levels are shown to have a direct correlation with cancer development. By collecting data about T4 (Thyroid) levels from dogs at a younger age, I will be able to find possible correlations in the future once the dogs begin to age.