

Holistic Pediatric Veterinary Medicine

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KEYWORDS

• Holistic • Pediatric • Veterinary medicine • Treatment

KEY POINTS

- An increasing number of clients are seeking holistic care for their pets.
- Holistic veterinary medicine treats the whole patient including all physical and behavioral clinical signs.
- Herbal and nutritional supplements can help support tissue healing and proper organ functioning, thereby reducing the tendency toward disease progression over time.
- Many herbal and nutraceutical companies provide support for veterinarians, assisting with proper formula selection, dosing, drug interactions, and contraindications.

HOLISTIC PERSPECTIVE

Holistic medicine is a way of practicing not a modality. *Holistic* is defined as “characterized by comprehension of the parts of something as intimately interconnected and explicable only by reference to the whole.”¹ In medicine, the term is also used to describe the treatment of the whole patient, including physical, mental, and social symptoms of a disease. A veterinarian can practice as holistically as possible regardless of the techniques they use. However, some modalities lend themselves much more readily to a holistic approach than others. Therefore, practitioners interested in using a holistic approach will benefit greatly from learning these modalities.

Individual Nature of Health and Disease

As veterinarians, we see some patients only for routine examinations and vaccinations, whereas others present repeatedly for ailments. These patients' ailments often relapse when treatments are discontinued. Sometimes a patient exhibits a specific pattern of disease that moves from one location to another. For example, one might see a puppy for vaginitis, later otitis externa, and then subsequently for enteritis. A sudden onset of inflammation, odor, pain, and discharge might be present in this

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patient each time, whereas another individual might experience slow smoldering signs and lethargy whenever sick.

Progression of Disease

Most veterinarians are well educated in proper diagnostic methods and judicious use of medications. A cat presenting with signs of cystitis only receives antibiotics if warranted by a urinalysis. Using thorough diagnostic protocols to select appropriate medicines often leaves simpler effective treatment lacking for relatively common maladies. Relapses of a condition after discontinuing medication can be concerning. Diarrhea might respond quickly to a bland diet and kaolin and then relapse needing more extended treatment. With time, the returning condition may require strong medicines (with significant potential side effects) to achieve what 3 days of a bland diet had initially achieved. Even with proper treatment, sign severity often progresses from very mild to severe over time. We can often predict the pattern of progression without effectively averting it. The only choice seems to sequentially apply increased suppression to the signs. The temptation arises to apply the big guns to the first outbreak of mild imbalance. This practice often extends the time until the signs return. However, when they do recur, their severity may increase more rapidly.

Treating Whole Patients

Through studying alternative therapies, one can become proficient in simpler yet effective forms of treatment that nourish patients (and their organs) and reverse this tendency to worsening. These techniques address all aspects of a patient's illnesses at the same time. A cat that often vomits, has a greasy coat with pruritus, is anxious with a tendency to become irritable, and presents for sterile cystitis no longer has 3 to 4 separate conditions. Improvement of each sign that is being treated is assessed but not as if separate from the others or the overall wellbeing of the patient. Signs are clues to the big picture of patient's basic imbalance or weakness. Their expression is related to one another as is their treatment. The author presents a very brief overview of modalities she uses as well as some basic treatments that may be useful for beginning holistic practitioners and conventional practitioners interested in integrating a new holistic approach into their practice.

DESCRIPTION OF COMMON COMPLEMENTARY AND ALTERNATIVE VETERINARY MEDICINE MODALITIES

Traditional Chinese (Veterinary) Medicine

Diagnosis and treatment using Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) emphasizes the functional aspects of health and disease. Disorders are grouped based on which organs are affected as well as the nature of the affection. Some practitioners are confused by the English translation of descriptive terms used in categorization. Some disregard the modality as valid because of its attempt to acknowledge conundrums and alternating states, whereas others find this one of its biggest strengths. Recognizing that terminology is merely an attempt to describe what is routinely seen clinically is exceedingly helpful. Reading a TCM colleague's diagnosis of toxic heat may sound exceedingly foreign; but when viewed as a description of the functional disturbances occurring within the body, this can be more readily understood. This label would be appropriate in conditions such as food poisoning or upper respiratory infections. It is an acknowledgment that the condition is creating increased heat in the body (as we know inflammation/infection does). It is also recognizing that the level of toxins in the body is high. We recognize that inflammation creates toxins; we can see toxic

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