

HOMEOPATHIC MEDICINE

By Dr. Marilyn Sthamann, CVH

I graduated from the Western College of Veterinary Medicine in Saskatoon in 1985. I have since been practicing small animal medicine in Regina as a partner at Lakewood Animal Hospital. The media attention given to alternative and complementary medicine in recent years, as well as my communications with friends and clients led me to investigate options for my patients' health care. A colleague in Nova Scotia who has been practicing holistic medicine advised me to begin with some introductory reading in homeopathy. My interest grew, and when I was informed of a professional veterinary homeopathy course being offered in Canada, I decided to enroll. After 4 years of study, writing detailed case reports, and completing the final exam, I became certified with the Academy of Veterinary Homeopathy in September 2003.

A Short History of Homeopathy

Dr. Samuel Hahnemann was a German physician and chemist living in the latter half of the 18th century. He was uncomfortable with the state of medicine at the time as he felt it inflicted needless suffering on those it was meant to assist. While taking an absence from practice he supported himself by translating medical texts. During this translating he read of a method of treatment which could be considered fairly crude homeopathy. He tried remedies on himself and his family. As his curiosity increased so did his devotion to the development of the science of homeopathy. He spent years collecting information on remedies, compiling references on symptoms and remedies, and writing texts on the principles of homeopathy, which stand today.

Homeopathic medicine was the primary method of treatment in Europe, India, and North America until the early 20th century. Homeopathic medicine is still a primary mode of care for many people in France, Britain, Germany, and India today. Homeopathy is gaining favor once again in North America as people rediscover its intriguing benefits.

Development of Veterinary Homeopathy

Dr. Richard Pitcairn graduated as a veterinarian from UC Davis in 1965. He began practicing small animal medicine shortly after graduating and was anxious to apply all he had learned to heal his sick patients. He became disillusioned as he discovered that many of his patients were not being cured with his help, but were facing ongoing chronic problems that he was unable to remedy. He went back to university and enrolled in post-graduate study in veterinary immunology, virology, and biochemistry. He believed that there he would learn the real secrets of the body's defense systems. After five years of study and receiving his Ph.D. he found that the answers to his questions still eluded him. Though he had acquired an even greater wealth of factual information about the mechanisms of immunology and disease, he believed his questions about chronic disease still had not been answered.

It was at this time Dr. Pitcairn began investigating alternative medical approaches. He came upon homeopathy and was excited to learn about a system of medicine that was based on very solid principles, and a holistic approach to the body. He has successfully been practicing homeopathic medicine for the past 20 years in the United States. He began teaching

veterinarians the principles and practice of homeopathy about 12 years ago and has developed the professional veterinary homeopathy course that I have taken. He also became one of the founders for the Academy of Veterinary Homeopathy. This is an organization that is dedicated to training and certifying veterinarians, educating the public, and maintaining a high standard of practice of homeopathy. The book Natural Health for Dogs and Cats, in the reference list, is written by Dr. Pitcairn. This is a new field of practice, especially for Canadian veterinarians. At present there are approximately 50 veterinarians in Canada qualified to practice homeopathy, only myself in Saskatchewan.

Principles of Homeopathy

- A substance which can produce a spectrum of symptoms in a healthy individual will cure that same spectrum of symptoms in a sick individual, the principle of “like curing like”.
- Provings were performed to study each homeopathic remedy. Healthy volunteers take a remedy with unknown properties (placebo in a randomized fashion) and record any symptoms noticed from a previously recorded baseline. The remedy then has subtle effects on the nervous system, immune system, digestive processes, heart, etc. If described in great detail and with an eye to whatever is most peculiar and unique, a picture of the remedy gradually emerges.
- The approach is to prescribe a substance in small doses, which has been proven to stimulate similar symptoms in healthy volunteers on all levels of the organism – not only “cramps and diarrhea, but also mental/emotional symptoms, temperature intolerance, sleep patterns”. Each case would get a different remedy since they are individualized to the whole person (animal).
- View each person as a whole individual, focusing on unique aspects. Correctly prescribed, a remedy is designed to strengthen the individual as a whole. As the system strengthens, the symptoms of disease fall away naturally.
- The next problem for Samuel Hahnemann was: How can one test poisonous or powerful substances on healthy people – much less administer them to the sick? After ten years of experimentation, Hahnemann developed a process described as potentization – serial dilutions of the original substance interspersed with vigorous shaking. Specifically, an alcohol tincture of the original substance (plant, mineral, animal product) is diluted 1:100. The vial is vigorously shaken (with the force of pounding a leather-bound book) for 40 succussions. This is then further diluted 1:100 and shaken. And the process continues in kind.
- Hahnemann and subsequent homeopaths found empirically an amazing fact – the more the remedy is shaken and diluted, the more the curative power is increased, while simultaneously decreasing toxicity.
- Even more astounding is the fact that there seems to be no limit to this. Diluting past the point at which there is no molecule of the original substance left continues to enhance

curative power without toxicity. Until now, this seems to defy known laws of chemistry, but it is now believed that the activity of the remedies lies in the realm of physics, not chemistry. For more information on this topic, I suggest looking at the website www.homeopathic.org. Richard Gerber's book Vibrational Medicine is also recommended.

Summary

The first Principle of Homeopathy is that of Similars. A substance which can produce a spectrum of symptoms in a healthy person can cure that spectrum of symptoms in a sick person.

The second principle is that of potentization. The original substance is diluted serially, with vigorous shaking in between. This is done beyond the point of there being any molecule of the original substance present, yet potency for healing is increased if properly prescribed.

Remedies are prepared by very strict, FDA-controlled standards in ultra-careful manufacturing plants. I order my remedies from homeopathic pharmacies in Quebec.

Homeopathy works by encouraging the body's own system to overcome the problem and cure itself. A remedy is provided that matches the body's individual response, strengthening that response, and completing the task of healing.

Why Use Homeopathy for Pets?

Homeopathy can support healing of minor ailments, and can also be very useful in disease. Consider homeopathy for such chronic conditions as asthma, skin disease, chronic diarrhea, and even cancer. Homeopathic remedies do not have side effects. They tend to work slowly, often bringing about an improved emotional state to our pets before physical improvement. This is great to see as homeopathy will improve your pet's general health not just physically, but mentally and emotionally as well.

Factors Needed to Achieve Health and Healing

In order to achieve healing, my clients are counseled on the need for the elimination of 'obstacles to cure'. Such obstacles may be:

- a) emotional stresses – a patient that is stressed with family turmoil, neglect, or the loss of a companion, for example, cannot respond to any medical care as well as a patient in a stable environment.
- b) lack of exercise – we all need regular exercise and fresh air to maintain our health
- c) unhealthy environment – all individuals are stressed when in environments contaminated with toxins including cigarette smoke
- d) poor nutrition – our bodies need all the 'building blocks' for healing, including a nutritious diet.
- e) vaccinations – are not given while actively treating a patient homeopathically.
- f) Conventional drugs – I withdraw all medications either before treatment or gradually during treatment, depending on the case.

A patient's ability to respond to homeopathic treatment also depends on other factors. If the patient has been treated extensively with conventional medicines over a period of time, it will cause the symptoms of the original illness to have been masked. The drugs themselves will also cause symptoms unrelated to the actual illness. All of this makes it more difficult for the patient's system to respond, and for the homeopath to find the correct remedy for that patient.

If the patient's illness has caused irreversible damage (pathology) to the organs it is not possible to reverse the damage. Homeopathic medicine does have the power to help maximize the function of any remaining healthy tissue and ameliorate symptoms of, for example, late stage kidney failure or cancers.

Nutrition

For the past 40 years or so, we have been taught that in order to properly care for our pet companions we must feed them a well balanced, complete dog or cat food. As veterinarians, we are taught about the building blocks of the body and proper nutritional support. We were told to feed pets quality pet foods to prevent any imbalance in their diets. Certainly all these years of research into what constitutes a proper dog or cat diet has given us much insight in the components needed for maintaining their health. What many breeders, veterinarians, and pet owners are beginning to question is the effects of feeding a processed and preserved food from the age of weaning until the last days of our pets' lives!

When dog food is made, the ingredients are cooked and dehydrated to make kibble. Even if the best quality ingredients were used to begin with, the processing of the food destroys key components of the food, making the food 'less than it was in its raw form'. As we all know, pet food is not made with the 'best quality ingredients'. Then, to compensate for the loss of essential vitamins, etc. by processing, the companies add these components back into the food, but in a form that is not as well assimilated by the body. The next thing to consider is the fact that this food is now preserved to allow it to sit in a bag for months at a time, non-refrigerated, and still maintain its value. We are all aware of health concerns related to the large amount of processed food the human population consumes every day of the year!

There are many people who have returned to the natural way of feeding our dogs and cats. Being carnivores, and hunting animals, these animals in the wild would be eating rabbits and other small rodents and birds. They would be eating the meat raw, and ingesting the small bones of these animals on a daily basis.

Since studying homeopathy, and looking at factors like nutrition from the more natural perspective, I have been counseling clients to feed a natural, fresh food, homemade diet to their pets. It has been amazing to see the difference in their health, with some problems subsiding, and occasionally a pet's symptoms have healed with no other treatment! Clients report improvement in their pet's attitudes, becoming brighter, more active, and witness the development of healthier, thicker hair coats. These clients have seen the benefits of feeding a fresh food, and believe they made the correct choice for their pet's health.

We are committed to providing a variety of the highest quality foods and supplements in our Nutrition Centre. Our staff is passionate about finding healthy alternatives and the most nutritious products available for your pets.

What you may expect during treatment.

I like to think of homeopathic therapy as a way to rebalance an animal's health. And, as one goes through the process of rebalancing, the scale may tip back and forth.. Old symptoms may reappear temporarily, your animal's appetite may surge upward before leveling off, or your pet may seem sleepy but more rested.

Homeopathy works by supporting the body to heal the underlying chronic illness. In most cases of chronic disease it takes half as long, at least, to treat a case as the individual has been ill. Most chronic cases take 1.5 to 2 years of treatment. I like to prepare guardians to be patient as we treat.

I begin by taking about one hour to collect the first history. From this information I choose symptoms which best describe your pet's unique state. These are analyzed with the help of a homeopathic software program. A number of potentially appropriate remedies are then studied. The remedy matching the case most closely is then prescribed. At the time of the follow-up, the response to the remedy is assessed. Depending on the response I will wait further, give a higher potency of the same remedy, or change remedies. Subsequent follow-ups and remedy prescriptions will be needed over the course of long term treatment.

You will be asked to record a journal from day to day as instructed. I will need to see your pet at various times during treatment. I collect information reasonably well by phone, so some of the follow-ups are done this way.

REFERENCES

Natural Health for Dogs and Cats by Richard Pitcairn, DVM, PhD and Susan Hubble Pitcairn

Homeopathy: Beyond Flat Earth Medicine by Timothy Dooley

Can also be read online www.beyondflatearth.com.

Internet Sites

www.homeopathic.org

Dr. Richard Pitcairn's website: www.drpitcairn.com

Academy of Veterinary Homeopathy: www.theAVH.org

Complementary and Alternative Veterinary Medicine: www.altvetmed.com

Raw Food Websites

www.urbancarnivore.com

www.wysong.net