

Hey there, and welcome to Lesson Nine, Non-Traditional Forms of Veterinary Treatment.

You know, you'll recall back in Lesson Three, we talked a lot about integrative veterinary care, and combining Western, or conventional, veterinary medicine with alternative or holistic, or natural care. We didn't really have enough time in that lesson to kind of get into some specific types of treatment modalities as far as non-traditional things go. So that's what Lesson Nine is for. I wanted to sit down and be able to have a chat with you about some of the more commonly encountered non-traditional forms of treatment in veterinary medicine. These terms, non-traditional, holistic, complementary, alternative, they kind of all get used interchangeably.

The terms holistic, complementary, alternative, non-traditional, et cetera, they kind of all get sort of used interchangeably. Let's go ahead and talk about some of the more commonly encountered things that you may see in veterinary medicine. Many of these things I practice in my office here in Oakland, California. So I've very personally seen very positive results with. The first one is Chinese Medicine, sometimes referred to as TCM, Traditional Chinese Medicine, sometimes in the veterinary field referred to as TCVM, Traditional Chinese Veterinary Medicine.

But there are a number of aspects of Chinese Medicine, but the two that you will most likely encounter would be Acupuncture and Chinese Herbal Therapy. From a Chinese medical perspective, a lot of what we're doing is moving energy throughout the body. The Chinese believe that there are what are called Meridians throughout the body, and energy moves in a circular pattern throughout these Meridians. The Meridians travel all throughout the body in very specific patterns. When there's any sort of disruption of that energy flow, from a Chinese medical perspective, that's where disease happens.

For example, what we might consider joint inflammation in an animal, we might call it arthritis from a Western medical standpoint, the Chinese would have a different way to approach that, they would look at it, for example, as stagnation of energy. Then, the approach would be then to relieve the stagnation of energy, and sometimes that's done with acupuncture needles, sometimes it's done with herbal therapy. So the interesting thing when you look at Chinese medicine, so for example, you look at Chinese herbs that are commonly used, say, for arthritis, what you find is you find herbs that, from a Western perspective, are anti-inflammatory, and pain relieving.

There's a lot of overlap here. It's just different in terminology and it's a difference in the way that these conditions are described. Similarly, when it comes to acupuncture, research has shown that the placement of acupuncture needles can improve blood supply to a specific area, and it can also help with the release of natural pain relievers in the body, again, to improve healing, and decrease pain. A very different approach from the Western medical approach, but when done appropriately, can be very, very effective for a wide range of treatments, a wide-range of disease conditions, certainly not just arthritis. But internal conditions such as inflammatory bowel disease, kidney disease, Chinese medicine can be used for things like cancer, for allergies, for seizures, pretty much anything that Western medicine will address Chinese medicine will also address, just in a different way.

Like pretty much all complementary modalities, Chinese medicine can be used in conjunction with Western medicine, or other forms of alternative care. It's certainly not, it's not an either-or, as we discussed back in Lesson Three, it's the integration of all of these things, it's where the magic, if you will, tends to happen.

I want to talk now about Chiropractic. Chiropractic Therapy is the science and the medicine of manipulating areas in the body to improve body function. When I took my chiropractic training for veterinary medicine, one of the biggest eye openers for me is I always thought of chiropractic as moving bones. But in reality, what you're doing when chiropractic is being practiced, you're actually adjusting the nervous system. That's really much more what it's about. Particularly when we're talking about the spine.

It will come as no surprise to you that there's a wide variety and a large number of nerve endings, and nervous input around the spine. When spinal segments are being moved through appropriate chiropractic adjustments, a lot of times what we're doing is we're helping to reset the nervous system. By doing that, you can secondarily affect levels of pain, you can cause muscles to relax, you can improve range of motion and joint flexibility. There's a lot of things that can be done with chiropractic. Chiropractic is a treatment modality that I would be ... I would very, very strongly recommend that the only person doing chiropractic on an animal is a person that is specifically trained to do chiropractic on animals.

That could be a veterinarian, it could also be a chiropractor that has been specifically trained to treat animals. The reason why I say this is because if somebody were to try and do chiropractic adjustments on a dog, or a cat, in the way that they're done in people, you could hurt that animal. There are very, very significant differences

between the two, and it's important to understand those in order to be able to practice chiropractic on animals.

Moving on to another field of alternative medicine, homeopathy. Homeopathy is a very interesting form of medicine that basically looks at using energy to treat a condition. In other words, the way homeopathy works is, let's say a patient has a stomach ache, homeopathy will take a compound that is known that if you were to administer that compound it would be known to cause a stomach ache. But then, from a homeopathic standpoint, that compound has been diluted out to the point where there is very little, or sometimes not even any detectable amount of that compound left, and the theory is, is that the energy of that compound will then stimulate the body to heal and relieve the stomach ache, to continue this example.

I think, for a lot of people, the philosophy behind homeopathy, it doesn't sit very well. It's a little bit difficult to understand. To be completely honest with you, I do not practice homeopathy as a veterinarian, I do have somebody that comes in, who is a classically trained homeopath, who does. There is a lot of training, and a lot of education involved with homeopathy and it's just not something that I personally had time to invest in. And as such, I prefer to leave homeopathy to the experts.

One other last thing to note as far as homeopathy goes is that in the purest sense, from a homeopathy standpoint, homeopathy is only supposed to be used as kind of a standalone therapy. So technically speaking, you're not supposed to do any other therapy, Western or otherwise, along with homeopathy. Most homeopaths I know don't really adhere very rigidly to that, and they will integrate it in with other treatments as well. But just so you know, if somebody ever brings that up, a classical homeopath, a purist, will only want to do homeopathy and nothing else. As you know from our previous lessons, I'm a very strong believer in integrative medicine, so that's not a philosophy that I tend to subscribe to.

I want to move into another topic now, essential oils, you may be familiar with essential oils. Sometimes it's referred to as aromatherapy. It's funny, because when you think of it from the standpoint of aromatherapy, it all sounds very, the term that I'll use is woo-woo, it doesn't sound like real science, it doesn't sound like real medicine. But the thing to remember about essential oils is essential oils are, they're actually chemical compounds called terpenes. Terpenes are chemical compounds that are very well-known to have physiologic effect, to have physiologic benefits. Terpenes are produced by plants for various reasons. Sometimes they're produced by plants to

protect the plant. So, for example, terpenes have antibacterial, and antifungal activity. They can repel insects or other predators as a plant.

Some terpenes are actually used as an attractant. For example, roses create that wonderful smell that roses make, those are terpenes that the plant is producing to attract pollinating insects. Terpenes have very specific activity, and it turns out that they have very particular activity in non-plants as well, so in animals. I know it can be very tempting to think of essential oil therapy as not real medicine, and certainly it can be used very, very casually, you know, from the standpoint of just spraying a little lavender in a room, but it can be used therapeutically as well by veterinarians who are trained in essential oil therapy.

One very important thing to remember as far as essential oils go is that animals sense of smell is far, far more acute than ours is as a human, as such, it's very important to only use essential oils in doses that are appropriate for animals. At the very least, essential oils used in too strong of a concentration can be offensive to animals, they really don't like it. There actually are instances and case reports of toxicity occurring in animals, particularly in cats, when essential oils are used in too strong of a concentration. So my recommendation to you, if you're going to use essential oils, would be either number one, consult with a veterinarian who's trained in essential oils, or number two, only use essential oil products that are specifically designed for animals, that way you will know they are going to be safe.

If you do use essential oils in your home, just for you, it's very important to make sure that your pet has a way to get away if they want to. So for example, if you have an essential oil diffuser in your room, you want to make sure that your dog, or your cat, doesn't get trapped in that room. If they don't like the smell, you need to be able to let them to go somewhere else to get away from the smell.

I think a quick segue from essential oils, because there is a bit of overlap here that I want to talk about is a topic of no small amount of controversy, and that is the use of medical cannabis. Medical cannabis, or medical marijuana, has enormous potential for medical benefit both in animals and in people. It is gaining more and more attention as time goes on. I'm sure that you have all seen advertisements for CBD products, or hemp oil products either in pet stores or online. You may have even used these products in your pet.

CBD and hemp is certainly a form of cannabis. Medical cannabis is a much more broad topic however. Things like THC, the psychoactive component of cannabis,

actually can be used therapeutically in animals as well. But it has to be dosed very, very carefully. The reason why I segued to medical cannabis from essential oils is because one of the things that makes medical cannabis effective is actually the terpene content. It's actually the essential oils within the cannabis that complement the cannabinoids, the THC, the CBD, that sort of thing.

To be honest with you, the topic of medical cannabis is a topic that we literally could talk about for hours. I have done lectures for veterinarians on the topic of how to use medical cannabis that have gone on for four, five or six hours. We certainly can't get into that entire topic right now. But an important thing to remember about medical cannabis, if you're going to use an over-the-counter product like something that you would buy online, or the pet store that is made from hemp, so it's pretty much just CBD, those products are pretty safe, they can be used potentially for pain and inflammation. Sometimes even to help treat seizures.

As far as anything stronger, so for example, if you live in a state where cannabis is legal, and you would go, say, buy something stronger at a cannabis dispensary, I would very, very strongly ask you not to use these products without specific veterinary guidance. It is very, very easy to get into trouble. Dogs actually are far more sensitive to the toxic effects of THC than people are. Even if you adjust for body weight for dosing. So it's very, very important that you not try and do this on your own without some form of veterinary guidance. But that said, we'll leave the medical cannabis topic with saying that there is enormous potential here, and so much research to be done, and so much to talk about.

To take another step beyond, physical therapy, which in the veterinary world is called physical rehabilitation. If you've ever been to physical therapy yourself after a back injury or a surgery, you know what I'm talking about. It's exactly the same thing that we do in animals. So for animals that have had surgery, they've had back injuries, they have arthritis, and soreness, or they have other mobility issues, you can do many of the same techniques in animals that you can in people to get them stronger, to get them walking better, to improve their levels of pain. The really big difference between physical therapy in a person and physical rehabilitation in an animal is the motivation factor.

What I mean by that is as a person, if you're in physical therapy, your therapist is going to say, "You know what? This is going to hurt." And you have to push through it. As a person, you can make the decision to do that. That's never going to work with a dog. With dogs, we have to turn it into a game, we have to make it something that

they want to do. So whether it's treats, or toys, or praise, the team here that does physical rehabilitation, it's really fun to watch, because most of these dogs are having a blast, they're having a really great time while they're getting better. So it's really a lot of fun.

The last couple things I want to talk about, there is an incredibly wide range of herbal medicine that is available within veterinary medicine. We talked a little bit about Chinese herbs. But there's also Western herbal therapy, Ayurvedic, or Indian herbal therapy. There are hundreds, if not thousands of potential herbs that can be used in animals. But again, it's really, really important that these be used appropriately, so I would very strongly recommend that if you're going to use herbal therapy in animals, number one, if you purchase a product that is made specifically for an animal, then you can have some assurances that it will probably be safe.

But number two, if there's any way at all you can do this, have a conversation with a veterinarian first, particularly a veterinarian who is trained in herbal therapy. If you're looking for one, you can search for one online at the American Veterinary Holistic Medical Association. AHVMA.org, American Holistic Veterinary Medical Association. If you just go on their website, there's a thing that says, "Find a veterinarian," click on that, and you can search geographically, and hopefully there's one in your area. But again, when it comes to any of these therapies, always a good idea to consult with a veterinarian, or at the very least use a product that is specifically made for animals so you have good indications that it will be safe.

One last thing to note about non-traditional forms of therapy, we've talked about this a bit in chapter three is research. A lot of the modalities that we just talked about have some really good veterinary research behind them. The research format may often differ a bit from more conventional Western medicine, but that said, many, if not all of these things are backed by really solid medical research. It's something that is important to me, you know, if I am going to recommend some sort of medical therapy for one of my patients, it's really important that I have a lot of confidence that number one, it's safe, and number two, it stands a good chance of being effective.

That is really non-traditional therapy in a nutshell. Thanks so much for tuning in to Lesson Nine. We will see you soon for our final lesson of this module, Lesson Ten. Thanks.