

Complementary Medicine *for* Veterinary Technicians and Nurses



Nancy Scanlan

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and Nurses**

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Nancy Scanlan, DVM

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This book is dedicated to

R.B. Barsaleau, DVM, who taught me everything worth knowing about endurance riding and guided me into teaching veterinary technicians;

T.A. Holliday, DVM, PhD, who showed me how a specialist *should* behave;

and to my husband, Allan, who takes good care of my animal friends when I am gone and who puts up with all my projects.

And my sincere thanks to all the organizations who have helped expand the knowledge about complementary and alternative veterinary medicine.

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Preface

Although books on complementary veterinary medicine are becoming more plentiful, they are usually written for veterinarians and tend to be on the veterinary student textbook level. Other books on the subject are written for pet owners. They are good for an introduction to the subject but lack the depth needed to be useful for a technician in a practice. There are a growing number of owners who use natural methods for their pets. If a practice can't answer the questions these owners have, the owners often look for another resource who can. The other resource may be another veterinary practice, a well-meaning but misinformed neighbor, a poorly prepared lay practitioner, or even the Internet.

This book was written to help fill this information gap. It contains a description of the most common treatment modalities, with references supporting their use. It includes lists of commonly used herbs, supplements, and other methods. It also includes a discussion of how to navigate through the pro- and anti-holistic opinions to make an informed decision about whether a treatment method is promising or useful.

By opening informed discussions with pet owners about complementary medicine, it encourages owners to tell the technician or veterinarian about items their pets are being given, which they may never have mentioned to you previously. Being conversant with these methods will encourage your clients to ask before, not after using herbs or supplements that may interfere with a pet's treatment. It will help technicians answer any questions their practice's clients may have and help give answers to the skeptical. It can also help those who want to know if their clients are helping or hurting their pets.

This book can also answer questions for any veterinarian who is curious about the field but who does not yet need the depth of a textbook on the subject. The reference list in the appendices will help those who want to delve deeper into the subject and who want to find veterinarians well-versed in this field. There is a discussion of how to judge research in JAVMA, Medline, and other sources to verify benefits of a treatment and how to spot fallacies in reasoning (by both regular practitioners and holistic ones). Finally, there is a list of classes and certification courses that veterinarians, and sometimes technicians, can take for training in these subjects.

I hope you find this book useful.

About the Author

Dr. Scanlan taught veterinary technicians for 10 years in community colleges and at a 4-year college. She absorbed the best of both college cultures and learned how to help students become the best possible part of a veterinary health team.

Dr. Scanlan got her start in holistic medicine during her senior year in veterinary school when she read a book about the use of vitamin E for heart disease. One of the patients in her charge was a boxer dog with congestive heart failure. The dog had been given digoxin and furosemide for 1 year, and the heart condition was just starting to get worse. The supervising clinician did not want to increase the dose of digoxin for fear of side effects, and he was open to the idea of trying vitamin E. Dr. Scanlan guessed at a dose, and within 24 hours she was introduced to all the main aspects of complementary medicine:

1. Vitamin E worked a little too well, and the dog showed signs of digitalis toxicity. (Just because it's natural does not mean it is harmless.)
2. A lower dose helped and the dog improved. (Natural methods, used properly at the correct dose, can be safer than conventional medications.)
3. The supervising clinician was impressed, wanted to publish the results, but did not want it in a famous journal for fear of what his peers would think. (Some conventional veterinarians are interested and supportive but are worried about what could happen to their reputation if they become too involved.)
4. The cardiologist (who confirmed the digitalis toxicity) refused to believe that it was vitamin E even though he could not offer any better explanation.

(Others do not believe in holistic medicine, do not believe it works, do not accept the connection between a symptom or improvement in disease, or may think it is dangerous.)

This was the beginning of Dr. Scanlan's studies in nutraceuticals. Years later she heard a lecture by a medical doctor who also had learned acupuncture before it was recognized as a valid practice in this country. The doctor was a pain specialist and used it only on his worst cases. He requested they not tell anyone (for the same reasons as the veterinary clinician), but it worked so well he found people lined up on his clinic doorstep wanting treatment. Dr. Scanlan decided she needed to learn about this also.

She became certified in acupuncture, intending to use it only for pain. This worked for exactly 1 month, after which time a Doberman was brought in who "wanted to die," according to her owner. Blood tests were normal. An X ray showed arthritis in one hip. A physical exam showed a lick granuloma on the hock of the opposite leg (which had been there despite treatment for 7 years). Acupuncture helped so much that the lick granuloma went away. However, the dog still was not acting normally: she did not want to leave the house, had to be pushed out the door to relieve herself (and came back in as soon as possible), clung to the owner, and did not want to go anywhere. Drugs did not work. There was no good Western diagnosis. In TCM theory, this dog was exhibiting very yin behavior. Because she had not really intended to use acupuncture for anything but pain, Dr. Scanlan's TCM diagnosis did not go any further than this. She placed acupuncture needles in all the yang points she could remember.

The next week, the owner said, "I think maybe we overdid it." The dog was staying outside, refused to come in except to eat (then dashed back out), barked at everything, and had turned into an independent brat. This convinced Dr. Scanlan that TCM theory was actually worthwhile, and it was useful as a different way of looking at things when Western medicine can't give an answer. (A second, more balanced acupuncture treatment got the dog back in balance.)

That opened the doors to other studies, a membership in several holistic organizations, the founding of the California Holistic Veterinary Medical Association, and finally, to this book.

Introduction

“It does not matter whether medicine is old or new, so long as it brings about a cure. It matters not whether theories be eastern or western, so long as they prove to be true.”

Jen Hsou Lin, D.V.M., Ph.D.

Holistic veterinary medicine, also known as alternative, complementary, or integrative veterinary medicine, is increasing in importance and use in veterinary practice. Training of veterinary assistants and receptionists usually omits most methods of complementary medicine, thus anyone working for a holistic veterinarian may have to learn by osmosis, so to speak. Pet owners are often more knowledgeable in this field than are technicians or veterinarians, but they are also sources of misinformation. If you know at least a little bit about a subject, even if complementary medicine is not performed in your practice, clients are more likely to tell you about any complementary therapies they are using and to accept your advice about combining or dropping certain therapies. Other pet owners have many beginners' questions that could be easily answered by a technician with a little knowledge, allowing the holistic veterinarian to spend time doing what he or she does best: applying additional methods of diagnosis and treatment to chronic conditions that do not respond well to conventional treatments.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this book are to help the technician to

- understand holistic veterinary medicine.
- educate the public about holistic veterinary medicine.

- understand his or her role in helping the holistic veterinarian and what he or she can and cannot do.
- learn about methods the technicians themselves can use.
- gain some familiarity with what a holistic veterinarian can and cannot do.
- learn about training and certification programs in various aspects of holistic medicine for technicians and veterinarians.
- learn how to judge whether a nontraditional treatment shows promise.

The place of the technician can be especially important when performing the following tasks:

- answering general questions about holistic medicine
- discussing the practice's views on holistic medicine
- explaining what the veterinarian does and does not do
- taking a holistic history
- designing, judging, and feeding holistic diets
- explaining the care and administration of homeopathic remedies and preparing those remedies
- explaining how to store and administer herbal medication
- explaining Chinese medical theory
- helping with hospice care and grief counseling
- designing and administering a physical therapy program

OVERVIEW OF HOLISTIC MEDICINE

Veterinarians are interested in holistic medicine for a number of reasons. Many holistic veterinarians became interested because they themselves were helped by holistic rather than conventional medicine. Others saw the results that a holistic veterinarian was achieving that they themselves were unable to achieve using conventional medicine.

Some methods used in holistic medicine can add income and clients to the practice with only a little study and a minimum of additional expense. At the other extreme, however, are methods that require more expensive education and lifelong study. A holistic veterinarian may use a single modality, a few, or a combination of many. In general, no matter how it is used, complementary medicine emphasizes wellness, natural methods, treating the whole animal (not just a single disease), and preventive medicine. The human–animal bond often plays a big part in holistic medicine.

To attract clients who are interested in holistic methods, both the technician and the veterinarian must understand the clients' viewpoint and speak their language. In addition, if the clinicians in a practice are recognized as being knowledgeable about complementary medicine, the practice's clients are more

likely to turn to the veterinarian rather than the Internet as a source of information, which may prevent problems with malnutrition and misuse of herbs and other modalities. Instead of ignoring warnings about a dangerous practice, pet owners will act on the veterinarian's advice, perhaps preventing a catastrophe. For example, when grapes and raisins were first recognized as causing kidney damage in susceptible individuals, there was a message making the rounds of pet owner e-mail lists that this was just another example of veterinarians who thought all dogs should eat only commercial dog food and that grapes were a healthy treat for dogs. Holistic veterinarians answered those claims, spread the word about the very real dangers, gave supporting case studies, and their responses rapidly replaced those uninformed comments. Until a veterinarian who is respected in the alternative medicine community gives a valid response to this type of misinformation, there is a very real danger of problems such as this, as well as use of toxic herbs, improper detoxification procedures (which can lead to death), avoidance of veterinary care until it is too late, and other disasters.

COMPLEMENTARY MEDICINE FOR SMALL ANIMALS

The goal of holistic medicine is to normalize the body, bring it back into balance, help it heal itself, and provide solutions that are more natural than those used in traditional medicine. Better food, exercise, and treating the whole animal, not just the symptoms, are elements of practicing holistic medicine. Instead of giving medications that just counteract the symptoms without fixing the root cause, holistic medicine tries to heal the body and stop the cause itself.

Conventional veterinarians follow this practice to a certain extent and have begun using items that have been staples of holistic medicine for years. (See Chapter 4 for examples.)

For instance, to treat inflammatory bowel disease, special diets are often prescribed, some of which contain prebiotics. A few companies are now also marketing probiotics to conventional veterinarians to treat this disease as well as others. This approach is good for you, your pet, and the environment. Because complementary medicine aims to treat the whole animal, not just the disease, the idea is to help the body heal itself rather than use methods to fight single problems and ignore others (including side effects brought on by those other methods).

To determine what is wrong in the whole animal, diagnostic methods and vocabulary may be used that are different from that to which conventional veterinarians are accustomed, including methods that have been used for thousands of years. These methods may bring insight by offering a new way of looking at a problem and may guide the veterinarian to a new treatment modality. This is especially true of chronic diseases. For example, inflammatory

bowel disease (IBD) is a catch-all term for chronic inflammation of the gastrointestinal tract. Veterinarians will readily admit that what works for one animal will not work for all animals in treatment of this disease. In fact, a diet that helps one animal (such as a high-fiber diet) may harm another animal (that requires a low-fiber diet). By using traditional Chinese theory, Ayurvedic medicine, or taking a homeopathic case study, this general diagnosis can be broken down into a number of different parts, each of which would require different herbs or remedies and diets. Instead of a hit-or-miss treatment method (if this doesn't work, try that thing next), a more precise treatment may begin right away.

Another tenet of holistic medicine is the idea that we and our pets are bombarded by unnatural substances: artificial flavors, colors, and preservatives, substances such as corn gluten meal, insecticides, air fresheners, cat litter perfumes, even nylon dog collars. These substances can build up in the body and cause reactions in sensitive individuals. Treatment consists of not only removing these from the environment but also removing them from the body by a procedure known as *detoxification*.

Overvaccination is an issue of concern to many holistic veterinarians. Fibrosarcomas in cats have been linked to vaccination. Other less well-known problems may include autoimmune disease and chronic arteritis, as well as other chronic inflammatory diseases (Hogenesch et al., 1999; Souayah et al., 2009). The American Association of Feline Practitioners (AAFP), the American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA), and the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) all now recommend vaccinating less often than once a year, and there is research in progress as of the writing of this book indicating that rabies vaccination is not needed more often than every 7 years. (See www.rabieschallengefund.org for progress and more information.)

Dogs and cats, originally considered to be servants (guard dogs and ratters) and then treated as employees (given a place in the house to sleep), are now increasingly looked upon as members of the family. Owners are more attuned to the human–animal bond.

With advances in veterinary medicine, dogs and cats (and other pets) are living longer lives, so the incidence of chronic conditions has increased. Owners are also increasingly concerned about a healthier lifestyle for themselves and for their pets. As a result of these concerns, owners are turning more and more to complementary medicine.

Veterinarians often practice both complementary and conventional veterinary medicine rather than only one or the other. Veterinarians may also use small parts of complementary medicine or they may embrace most of it wholeheartedly. This can lead to confusion in the minds of the public. It is important for veterinary technicians and nurses to recognize the practice philosophy of the veterinarian with whom they work in order to be able to explain what the

practice does and why when taking questions by clients who are shopping for a new veterinarian.

Practitioners of complementary medicine emphasize that they don't practice in a vacuum. Proper nutrition and exercise are important parts of complementary medicine, and no single modality works for every situation. There are situations for which surgery is the best answer, and in an emergency, Western medicine, with its fast action, is best for saving lives. But after the emergency is over and we need to get an animal back to homeostasis, complementary medicine is best to restore that balance.

Generally, when visiting a holistic practitioner, the first visit will last longer than does the average visit with a veterinarian who practices conventional veterinary medicine. For a holistic practitioner, the visit may last anywhere from 20 to 90 minutes. Clients are asked questions that a regular veterinarian may not ask, resulting in a more complete discussion of diet, supplements, exercise habits, and behavior. Because of the length of time and complexity of the visit, as well as the additional training required for the veterinarian, fees are generally higher. The public needs to understand that this increased attention is the reason for higher fees.

Complementary medicine is most useful for chronic problems. Because of the chronic nature of the problem being treated, the total number of visits varies depending on whether the problem can be cured or if the goal is to control the condition. Initially, most conditions will require several visits spaced anywhere from once a week to once a month. Later, they may be spaced farther apart.

As mentioned previously, veterinarians who practice complementary medicine usually have additional training and often, special certification in their chosen modalities. Veterinary technicians may also receive additional training in some modalities. It is important that clients understand what the practice does so they are not disappointed by, for instance, a veterinarian's views on vaccinations, raw foods, or other controversial issues. It is also good for one practice to know about other practices whose knowledge may be complementary. For example, if a patient does not fully respond to one technique, such as acupuncture, they may do better when chiropractic, massage therapy, or time in an underwater treadmill is added. If a practice is able to freely refer to and accept referrals from other practices, as other specialty practices do, this helps the whole veterinary community as well as the patients.

Just as in Western medicine, complementary medicine can have side effects. Properly trained veterinarians and technicians are aware of potential side effects and which treatments can interfere with Western medicine. When conventional practitioners see that a holistic practice is aware of these matters, they will be more likely to support their clients' use of holistic medicine and may even start referring them to a complementary medicine practice.

COMPLEMENTARY MEDICINE FOR HORSES AND LIVESTOCK

For large animals, holistic medicine has a different emphasis. For horses, a major emphasis of holistic medicine is that of sports medicine. Horse owners have been using physical therapy, including nutraceutical therapy, for many years. Stem cell therapy research started in horses (2003) before it was used in dogs (2006). Glycosaminoglycans have been available as products for horses longer than for dogs (1984 and 1997, respectively).

Reproductive problems are important for all large animals, and acupuncture plays a big part here. Some herbal medicine is also used. Large animals are most commonly treated by the veterinarian in stables or on farms, although owners may bring individual animals to a central clinic. Some horses are like family, but others are an investment for a specific goal (winning shows or races), and thus performance, rather than chronic care, is the emphasis for holistic medicine. For livestock, growth and reproduction usually are the areas of emphasis, and any treatment must be economical enough that a farmer or rancher will still make a profit when an animal is sold or has offspring. Preventive care as well as reproductive care can be helpful here. A holistic approach to feeding and pasture management can make a big difference in the success of a practice.

WHAT TECHNICIANS CAN AND CANNOT DO

By law in the United States, only a veterinarian can diagnose, prescribe, or perform surgery. If a technician is involved in any of these procedures, it is only under the direct supervision of a veterinarian. For example, although a technician may be certified in physical therapy and may recognize that there is restriction in motion of a limb or a trigger point present in the neck, the initial diagnosis of a physical problem must be done by a veterinarian. In most states, even licensed acupuncturists and chiropractors must work under the direct supervision of a veterinarian and will come to a veterinary practice to perform their services.

Some other practices, such as Reiki, are in more of a gray area and may be allowed by a state without the practitioner having to practice through a veterinary office. Practitioners of complementary medicine should be familiar with their state's practice acts in order to avoid breaking the law. The fact that another practitioner is treating animals independently of a veterinarian does not mean that the practice is legal.

There are some areas of holistic medicine that are more controversial. These modalities may not be supported by research that conventional practitioners are aware of, either because research is difficult because of the way the modality is practiced; because most research may be in a foreign language such as

Chinese, Japanese, or German; or because studies are few due to potential researchers having great difficulty obtaining research funds. Sometimes the methods just sound crazy, according to the way we understand the world. If a method has wide acceptance, there is a chance that there is something valid there, perhaps buried, perhaps different from what practitioners believe, but worth looking at. For example, there is no published double-blind research study showing an improvement in cancer using the Rife machine. However, the machine has been reported to be extremely effective in relieving the pain of osteosarcoma. (This observation has been confirmed by holistic veterinarians questioned at conferences and meetings.) Conventional painkillers at very high doses do not do this. For humans, treatment for this pain is palliative radiation therapy, enough to temporarily kill cancer cells and some normal tissue. Instead of attacking the use of a Rife machine for what it does not do, it would be far better to explore the helpful things it can do.

Finally, research on complementary or holistic medicine is scarce. There are also many more associations devoted to facets of human holistic medicine than there are for veterinary holistic medicine. Therefore, in this book, references and web sites for humans are often included, especially when they have more information (or sometimes, the only information) available.

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http://www.adequan.com/veterinarian_resource.aspx
A good source of information for Adequan. Includes package inserts, with research results.

What Is Holistic Medicine?



DEFINITION OF HOLISTIC MEDICINE

There are a number of terms used to describe holistic medicine. They have similar meanings, but some subtle differences.

- Holistic medicine treats the body as a whole, using whole herbs, complete supplements rather than single chemical sources, etc.
- Natural medicine does not use artificial chemicals; rather, it uses natural methods such as acupuncture, massage, herbs, and nutritional supplements.
- Integrative medicine uses a combination of the best of conventional and holistic medicine.
- Alternative medicine uses nonconventional but valid methods, including such ancient methods as Ayurvedic medicine and traditional Chinese medicine.

Holistic medicine is also called *natural medicine*, *complementary medicine*, *integrative medicine*, and *alternative medicine*. There is currently no single accepted name for the concept. Each of these labels indicates a separate aspect of the idea of non-mainstream medicine. In addition, treatments that were originally considered alternative are now becoming part of mainstream medi-

cine. This shift makes the term *alternative* less useful than some would think. *Complementary* or *integrative* medicine indicates the way that many holistic veterinarians practice this type of medicine: they rely on certain aspects of conventional medicine in their practice and use less conventional means for other aspects. In addition, mainstream veterinarians who adopt a formerly alternative treatment have integrated this into their practice. Many veterinarians prefer this terminology.

The term *holistic* medicine reflects the idea that we need to look at a person or pet as a whole (body, mind, and spirit) and at healing methods as a whole (whole herbs, herbs plus acupuncture, methods that treat body/mind/spirit, etc.). Conventional medicine, especially as it is taught or presented in textbooks, tends to look at a single disease with a single treatment method. When multiple diseases occur simultaneously, treatment compromises are necessary, and the best treatment for one disease may not be the best for others. For example, treating elderly animals often results in a compromise: they may have kidney disease, which would indicate the ideal diet should be low protein, but also have cancer, for which a moderately low-carbohydrate diet is preferred. If an elderly animal is thin enough, with a poor appetite, often the general advice is to feed it whatever it will eat because weight loss for these animals is the most immediate threat.

The idea of reducing the problem to a single diagnosis of a single disease that has an ideal treatment, also known as the *atomic* or *reductionist* approach, seeks to reduce a problem to its smallest part and to fix that part. This is a powerful approach when only one thing is wrong or only one problem is life-threatening. Holism begins with all the individual problems and tries to see a pattern, believing that the whole picture is greater than the sum of its parts.

A tenet of holism is that the absence of a specific diagnosed disease does not necessarily mean that a body is healthy. (This is why people who just don't feel well, but have normal lab tests, are usually not helped by conventional medicine but are often helped by the holistic approach.) This approach looks at the animal, the health problems it may have, mental aspects such as anxiety or aggression, the owner, the type of food being fed and any undesirable ingredients in that food, and the environment in which the animal is kept before recommending a treatment. Instead of a drug that has a single ingredient, herbs that contain a specific ingredient plus all its supporting factors may be preferred—or multiple antioxidants instead of one single vitamin, or a Chinese herbal formula with many herbs, etc. Even a single herb has many healing components that are synergistic rather than one single component that primarily treats one problem, and the herb can have a greater range of beneficial effects. Humans and animals originally evolved along with the plants they ate or used and may respond better to them than to a drug.

HISTORY OF HOLISTIC MEDICINE

- Some types of holistic medicine date back thousands of years.
- Ayurvedic medicine is from India, dating from before 1600 BC.
- Chinese herbal medicine is more than 2000 years old.
- Kampo (Japanese herbal medicine) began in 562 AD.
- Homeopathy began in Germany in the late 1700s.
- Chiropractic and osteopathy are more recent but developed to address problems that conventional medicine does not address.

Much of what we think of as holistic medicine was at one time considered conventional medicine. Ayurvedic medicine has been described in the *Rig Veda*, compiled before 1600 BC. Written descriptions of Chinese herbal medicine and moxibustion date back over 2,000 years (*Shen Nong Ben Cao Jing*). Kampo (Japanese herbal medicine and acupuncture) began in 562 AD when Chinese medical texts were brought to Japan. Homeopathy was developed in the late 1700s at a time when conventional medicine treated disease by bleeding, purging, and other unpleasant methods. Homeopathic hospitals were common in the United States in the late 1800s and early 1900s, and some evolved into present-day hospitals.

Other methods, such as chiropractic and osteopathic manipulation, have developed more recently as ways to help health problems that are not fully addressed by conventional medicine.

W. K. Kellogg invented cornflakes as a nutritious way to start the day at his health spa in the early 1900s. He emphasized the need for exercise as well as proper nutrition to help people recover (Kellogg Co., 2010). This idea was revolutionary in its time and is an example of a holistic way of looking at things that resonated with the populace and improved their health, without being a part of general medical practice.

HOLISTIC AND CONVENTIONAL TREATMENTS

The holistic practitioner may use treatments that are not as well documented by scientific literature as conventional treatments but that have had hundreds or thousands of years of use behind them. Holistic practitioners may consult respected sources that may be 2000 years old. Conventional veterinarians look at modern published sources and place special confidence in double-blind studies. Holistic practitioners and holistic clients are more likely to look at the body-mind connection and to delve into areas such as hospice care for pets, pet-owner interactions and their effect on pet health, and the whole process of death, dying, and grieving, although this is now a growing field in conventional veterinary medicine as well.

Table 1.1 Comparing and contrasting holistic and conventional practitioners.

Holistic Practitioners	Conventional Practitioners
Holistic practitioners may consult sources that are hundreds or thousands of years old.	Conventional treatments are mostly those that have been recently discovered or that may be only a few decades old
Holistic practitioners look at the human-animal bond and mind-body connection as part of their diagnosis and treatment.	Conventional practitioners tend to look at the human-animal bond as one of many behavioral diagnoses, with specific treatment depending on the problem.
Holistic practitioners are greatly concerned about side effects of conventional medicine.	Conventional practitioners are greatly concerned about the smaller amount of research done for holistic methods.
Holistic practitioners worry about quality control and contamination of pet foods.	Conventional practitioners are concerned about quality control and contamination of holistic remedies.

Another aspect that troubles holistic practitioners is the number of side effects or adverse effects of conventional medicine. A 2004 study showed that 1.2 million hospitalized patients experienced an adverse drug reaction. 90% of these reactions were to drugs that were properly administered (AHRQ Agency, 2007). Conventional medicine may not be safe or very effective for chronic conditions. Although there can be side effects from holistic methods, when used correctly, these effects are generally much less serious than those from conventional medicine. For example, consider drugs commonly used for arthritis in veterinary medicine. NSAIDs commonly have deleterious effects on the gastrointestinal tract, liver, and/or kidneys (FDA, 2006). These side effects are not always reversible, especially any renal damage that may occur. Veterinarians are cautioned to perform laboratory tests regularly when treating animals with these drugs. Corticosteroids such as prednisone can cause long-term muscle wasting, weight gain, liver dysfunction, polydipsia, and polyuria (FDA, 1991). In contrast, side effects from acupuncture or homeopathy used for arthritis are extremely rare (Weidenhammer, 2007). Massage therapy also has few adverse effects but has almost immediate benefits. Side effects of herbs used for arthritis, when used as trained herbalists recommend, are few, milder than effects of COX-2 inhibitors, and generally reversible (Setty and Sigal, 2005).

Conventional practitioners, in turn, are concerned about the lack of research available for a number of holistic methods. Quality control has been of concern in the past, but by using companies that control both quality and contamination it is much less of a problem than in the past.

The term *evidence-based medicine* (EBM) is often used as the gold standard for judging treatment methods. It is usually interpreted strictly as referring to

only research-supported methods and does not recognize the value of methods that have been used for so long that research has never been done. For example, the use of fluids to help pets with renal dysfunction feel better is widely used but is not supported by research. Giving subcutaneous fluids is recommended for kidney failure, especially for stages 3 and 4 (Polzin, 2004). There are good theoretical reasons for doing so. Yet, there are no research studies published for either benefits or risks of giving subcutaneous fluids for renal failure, and the evidence supporting its use is grade 3. Yet for those who have seen fluids used, it is clear that it helps these pets feel better.

A good definition of EBM is rather “the integration of best research evidence with clinical expertise and patient values” (Sackett et al., 2000). Roudebush and colleagues (2004) believe that for veterinary clinical nutrition, the best clinical decisions are made when clinical expertise, research evidence, and owner/patient preferences overlap. This model is also valid for the practice of complementary and alternative veterinary medicine.

HOLISTIC VETERINARIANS VERSUS HUMAN HOLISTIC PRACTITIONERS

- Pet owners will turn to holistic practitioners for humans if they can't find a veterinarian who treats animals holistically.
- Just as medical doctors are not qualified to practice on pets, most holistic practitioners for humans are not qualified to practice on pets.

If no holistic veterinarian is available, owners will often turn to those who practice on humans. Conscientious practitioners will seek training or at least an understanding of animals before they treat them, or they will associate with a veterinary practice so they have the input of a veterinarian. Alternatively, practitioners will tell owners they have not studied animals and refer owners elsewhere. This is important because animals' anatomy and physiology are different from those of humans. This is especially true for cats: they lack the main liver enzyme used by humans and dogs to process various substances, thus drugs and herbs that create no problems or that are only mildly toxic for a dog can be deadly for a cat. If a practitioner gains a client's trust, it may save an animal's life. (See the box Misinformation from a Chiropractor.)

MISINFORMATION FROM A CHIROPRACTOR

I once saw a cat that repeatedly suffered from levamisole poisoning. The owners, on the advice of their chiropractor, had been giving the equivalent of

(Continued)

a sheep's dose of levamisole weekly. They were trying to get rid of the parasites that the chiropractor diagnosed and that he told them needed to be treated for a month. As a result, the cat kept ending up in the emergency hospital with liver disease, to the mystification of the treating veterinarian. The owners never told their veterinarian that they were giving their cat levamisole because their veterinarian was skeptical about all holistic treatments. They did tell me because I was willing to talk about anything and everything holistic. I educated them about levamisole poisoning, the difference between cats and sheep, the susceptibility of cats to poisoning by almost anything, the superior ability of veterinarians versus chiropractors to detect parasites, and the necessity to discuss with their veterinarian, or a holistic veterinarian, any treatment not recommended by a veterinarian. I also let their veterinarian know what was going on.

Practitioners should do what they are trained to do. Those trained for humans should not practice on animals without further training.

USE OF HOLISTIC MEDICINE IN HUMAN PATIENTS

- One out of four human hospitals in the United States offered some type of complementary or alternative medicine services in 2006.
- Many pet owners use holistic medicine for themselves and their pets, but they often do not tell their veterinarian.
- Some interactions of holistic methods and conventional methods are possible, especially when clients use them without consulting a veterinarian.
- Veterinarians need to know *everything* a pet is taking because of possible interactions.
- Holistic methods may look or sound strange unless the practitioner understands the background behind them.

In human medicine, musculoskeletal problems are the focus of much of complementary medicine. In 2007, 37% of hospitals surveyed stated that they offered complementary/alternative medicine services. Massage therapy, acupuncture, and relaxation therapy were the most popular outpatient therapies; the top three inpatient therapies were pet therapy, massage therapy, and music/art therapy. The top three reasons for offering these services were patient demand, clinical effectiveness, and organizational mission (Ananth, 2009).

These alternative methods were well received by patients despite the fact that few insurance carriers cover complementary medicine, which results in patients paying for these services out-of-pocket.

More than three-fourths of adolescents interviewed had already used some form of complementary or alternative medicine in their life (Wilson, 2006). Veterinarians may be unaware that their clients use complementary medicine themselves and may already be using it for their pets. Interactions between some holistic treatments and conventional medicine are possible, however. If owners are not asked what alternative medicine therapies they are using for their pets, they will usually not volunteer the information to the practitioner, which may cause problems in treatment of a patient.

MISSING INFORMATION FROM A CLIENT

A dog was referred to me that had problems with both oxalate stones and struvite stones. A diet for one type of stone increased the possibility that the dog would get the other type, and this patient had already had surgery twice: once for oxalate stones and once for struvite stones. I was the first veterinarian who had asked the owners about any supplements or herbs they might be giving. The dog was on three calcium supplements in addition to the calcium he was receiving in his food. When the supplements were stopped, the stone problem went away.

Methods used by holistic veterinarians may seem strange, especially when judged by conventional medicine. Acupuncture looked like some sort of voodoo until Westerners saw what it did for people in China. Chinese herbs don't look anything like what most Westerners think of as herbs. Homeopathy does not make sense to many people. Veterinarians who don't see evidence of arthritis on a radiograph usually ignore the possibility of trigger points, muscle spasm, and decreased range of motion as a contributor to lameness. Bad behavior may be attributed to anxiety, stubbornness, or willfulness when it actually is caused by pain that is not easily elicited or detected by conventional means.

LAY (UNLICENSED) PRACTITIONERS

- Some unlicensed practitioners are very talented and can be very helpful.
- Others do not have sound knowledge or are not familiar with the differences between animals and humans and thus can harm pets.

Lay practitioners can be both a help and a hindrance to the practice of veterinary medicine. This field covers a wide variety of talents and treatments for pets. Some, such as Linda Tellington-Jones (See TTouch in Chapter 6),

have great talent, have studied their field carefully, and have evolved valid systems of treatment that can give amazing results. Others may use substances or amounts of substances that are toxic to animals. State boards of veterinary medicine are often overworked, underfunded, and understaffed, and usually focus on veterinarians rather than untrained lay practitioners who may do more harm.

POOR ADVICE FROM A LAY PRACTITIONER

Years ago in Southern California, there was a person who called herself an “herbalist” and advertised in the veterinary practice section of the yellow pages. She told her clients never to consult a veterinarian, not even holistic ones. One of her victims was brought to me for a second opinion. The practitioner had recommended an “herbal detox” for an ancient mixed-breed dog who developed severe diarrhea and dehydration. The owners had asked for a change in treatment, and the practitioner refused, saying the dog was just detoxing and they needed to let it run its course. Fortunately, the owners could see that the dog was deteriorating rapidly and ignored her opinion. Some of the herbs were toxic, so I stopped her formula, rehydrated the dog, substituted herbs that were actually beneficial, and the dog rapidly recovered. When I reported the so-called herbalist to the state board, their response was to send the person a letter telling her to stop advertising in the veterinary section of the yellow pages.

On the flip side are those who may do unusual things that you may not believe in but that are harmless and may actually give you or your veterinarian some insight. Those who practice “animal communication” (and who do it well) may provide some amazing insights that can help point treatment in a new direction. Always be willing to listen to pet owners who have contacted a good communicator. Often, a communicator’s reading agrees with what is being done (without having any contact with a practitioner beforehand), and sometimes it can give a veterinarian an idea that helps with the treatment. At the very least, it encourages the client to tell a practitioner everything possible that might have a bearing on the pet’s problems.

INTEGRATION WITH CONVENTIONAL MEDICINE

- There are times when holistic medicine works best and other times when conventional medicine works best.
- Conventional medicine has many useful diagnostic techniques unknown to ancient practitioners.