



First, know your animal

John Saxton explains the importance of ignoring animal stereotypes when treating them homeopathically

The secret to treating animals – and people – successfully is observation, and knowing what they are like normally. In selecting the correct remedy you need to know the changes from how your animal usually acts. For example if your animal doesn't generally like to go

near the fire, and suddenly wants to hug the fire, then that is significant when it comes to prescribing.

So the first thing that you've got to do is clear your mind of stereotypes and start looking at the individual animal. Secondly, you've got to know what the norm is with the individual animal. Take persistent vomiting for example. Animals, especially cats, tend to vomit as a normal thing with a much greater frequency than a doctor would find acceptable in one of his or her patients. A cat that vomits regularly is no big deal, but a person who vomits regularly would be taken very seriously. This is another example of how, as a vet, you've got to know your species, and you've got to know what the norm is.

I was recently speaking to a lady who was having a problem with her cat spraying in the house. It transpired that this behaviour had started after the introduction of a new kitten to the house. To that lady, the cat spraying in the house was a problem. To the cat it was a normal response to the introduction of a stranger into the pack. Spraying is a territorial act, and it's normal feline behaviour. It is very difficult to adapt animals to what we demand for our own social convenience. However various remedies – Staphisagria, Lachesis and Nat mur – can be tried, based around the resentment, jealousy, territorial aspects but the response may be poor or only temporary because the cat is essentially behaving naturally.

Everyone who has a dog knows that at some time or other the dog will have diarrhoea. A whine and a wet

nose in your ear forces you out of bed, you stagger downstairs, open the back door and throw the dog out, wait for it, close the door and send the dog to its basket. Now as good homeopathic owners, that is no longer acceptable. When the dog nuzzles up, you should spring wide awake, and immediately record the time, because the time of the diarrhoea is very important. If the dog has diarrhoea at 2.00am, you should immediately be thinking about giving Arsenicum album.

So you've noted the time, you've rushed downstairs and you've anxiously examined your best carpet to see if the dog has made a mess. This gives an indication of whether the animal has been able to hang on to its motion, or whether when it's got to go, it's got to go. Then you need to go outside with the dog because we want to know whether the diarrhoea is liquid, does it shoot out like water, is there any mucus in it, is the animal straining, is there blood in it?

The point is that in the conventional world, diarrhoea is just diarrhoea. Treating homeopathically, we are looking for very small differences, and it's often small differences that can give you the clue to the remedy that the animal needs. For instance, a dog's got violent diarrhoea. It's been a bit off colour all day, but now it's really unwell, and it's 9.00pm. That time factor sets you thinking about the remedy. If the dog has a diarrhoea that is minimal during the day but gets worse at night, you may need Merc sol. Merc sol is worse from sunset to sunrise. The homeopathic vet will take you seriously when you note these

signs but your conventional vet is unlikely to.

Another thing you check is heat. One of the symptoms calling for Arsenicum for example is burning pains, particularly in the abdomen, but which are relieved by heat. You can test whether this is the case for your dog by putting a hot water bottle (suitably wrapped up of course) on your dog's abdomen. If you find that the dog looks peaceful and relaxes, it's another indication that you're relieving the pain and, all other things being equal, the dog needs Arsenicum.

Touch is also important. Hepar sulph for example is indicated in those who are very sensitive to touch. You'll sometimes notice this in animals who are normally very friendly but who back away from you when they are ill because they are scared stiff of being touched. If an animal suddenly develops an aversion to being touched after an injury, Arnica may be indicated.

I can't stress too strongly that in homeopathy you do not talk about one remedy for one condition. Some books present the subject in this way and you quickly get the impression that if the animal has a temperature it needs Belladonna, if it has diarrhoea it needs Arsenicum. It's what I call cookery book homeopathy. Using homeopathy in this way won't work. Bear in mind for example that Arsenicum, whilst good for diarrhoea is also useful for some skin conditions amongst other things. You have to think broadly. Arnica, which we think of as a specific remedy for bruising, is also a very good support remedy for

failing hearts. So if you've got an old dog who's puffing and panting in the heat, you'll try Belladonna in vain. What the dog could benefit from is a dose of low potency Arnica, which will support the whole system. It's well worth considering it as a general support remedy.

We also have to consider the mental symptoms of animals. And this is where it really does get interesting because a lot of people think that we just cannot guess at the mental symptoms of animals. You would obviously know if you had an aggressive animal. At the other end of the scale you can get very submissive animals, who are Pulsatilla types – the ones who roll over at the drop of a hat and are very affectionate.

However, those are personality types. The mental effects are the changes in



normal behaviour you note in the animal, for example grief and resentment. These can both be very marked on the physical and behavioural level. One of the great remedies when it comes to anger and resentment is Staphisagria. A lot of cats that develop pustular skin conditions and hair loss respond well to Staphisagria, and you can often trace these



This article has been adapted from a talk given by John Saxton at the Homeopathic Trust supporters' event held in London in September 1999.

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problems back to neutering. These conditions are not always as our conventional colleagues believe, due to upsets to hormone levels or allergies, but due to resentment at being neutered. These symptoms occur more often in male cats, but can be found in both sexes. Staphisagria may help in these situations, but you may find that the cat's resentment is a normal reaction to its treatment, and therefore you may only get a limited response to the remedy. Other remedies may be tried on a constitutional basis.

We get an awful lot of trouble with young teenage girls, in the animal sphere I mean. Obviously it depends on the type of veterinary practice you have, but I regularly see horses that are sold as perfectly docile and placid who suddenly become vicious – biting, bucking and kicking – when they get to their new homes. This can often reach the stage where the owners return their horse and ask for their money back.

The story here is almost invariably the same. This young pony or horse has been bought for the young teenage daughter who has spent all her Saturdays and all her holidays caring for it, grooming it and riding it. Suddenly boys are more interesting, and the horse gets less and less attention, until the father finally says, "I'm not going to pay for a horse that you're no longer using," and the horse is duly sold. But the horse is unhappy with its new owners because it has formed an attachment to that girl and is suffering from grief. And this is typical of Nat mur which tends to work in most of these cases.



Another case I remember from last year was a cat that was referred to me with chronic cat flu, a typical upper respiratory tract infection. This animal had already been seen by another vet and been prescribed the usual antibiotics. They were not getting very far with this treatment. The cat was brought to me and I looked



at the history preceding the onset of the syndrome. In this case, the girl who owned the cat had gone off to university. From the animal's point of view, she had departed for no valid reason. Animals have their own priorities, and in a lot of cases, they're more sensible than ours. The remedy I used for this particular cat was Ignatia, another useful remedy for grief, and the 'flu cleared up beautifully.

When you're looking at your animal, you've got to be extremely careful about interpreting what you see with regard to an animal's mental characteristics and not impose a human interpretation on your pet's behaviour. You must know and understand your species.