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# What does it mean to be holistic?

## Who can legally treat animals?

In the UK, as in most of Europe, only qualified vets are allowed to diagnose and treat animals, and this applies to conventional and alternative treatments alike. In a few cases (notably osteopathy and physiotherapy), a practitioner who is not a vet is allowed to treat an animal, provided the animal is first examined by a vet who diagnoses the problem and recommends osteopathy or physiotherapy as a suitable treatment. It may seem bizarre that animals are better protected than humans in this regard, as alternative practitioners who treat humans are generally not required to hold medical degrees. Nevertheless, animals, being less able to communicate their symptoms or give their consent, benefit greatly from this added protection.

The potential downside to this restrictive regulation could be a lack of qualified practitioners. Luckily, a large number of vets hold further qualifications in holistic treatment modalities such as homeopathy and acupuncture. At the end of the book, you will find the information you need to locate them.

In some parts of the world, practitioners with qualifications in alternative therapies but without veterinary degrees are allowed to treat animals. Find out what the rules are in your country and contact the appropriate governing

bodies to ensure that your practitioner is properly trained, licensed and insured. If your animal is ill and you want him to be treated by someone who is an authority in their field but not a vet, first consult your vet to ensure a correct diagnosis. A medical diagnosis is always the first step, regardless of which treatment is to follow.

## Alternative to what?

Conventional medicine, as it is taught in medical schools to both vets and doctors, takes a very mechanistic view of the patient. The immensely complex living body is broken down into parts, much like a car or a dishwasher. You learn how the different parts work, and when there is a problem you try to locate the bit that is broken, and fix it. Is it the pump or the wiring: the heart or the nervous system?

Many vets and doctors later specialise in specific organ systems. You may have noticed how our hospitals, and increasingly our veterinary referral centres, are organised into departments looking separately at our various parts: gastro-intestinal disease, heart and lung disease, and so on. If a patient doesn't fit into any of the boxes, as is often the case, he can find himself passed from one department to the next without ever meeting anyone able to

look outside the box at the bigger picture or the whole patient.

### Why does chronic disease exist?

In some situations, the conventional approach described above is an adequate and appropriate way to treat disease. This is especially true in cases of accidents and emergencies, such as severe acute disease or surgical procedures. In many cases, however, this approach simply does not lead to a cure.

The large number of people and animals who have to live with a chronic condition are clear examples of this. The term *chronic* means that the illness is long term, and often the patient lives with the same condition for years, and isn't expected to be cured. Ever. This is because the tools available through conventional medicine – the conventional toolbox – don't hold the answer for these patients.

### Complementary co-operation

*It is never a question of choosing between conventional and alternative healthcare. Use the best of both worlds. Different methods of treatment have different strengths and weaknesses. Remember that, regardless of how your animal is to be treated, the first step always consists of a thorough examination to determine what is wrong. A diagnosis is always the first step*

Often, carers will be told by their vet that the disease is incurable, and can only be 'managed' with symptomatic treatment. We could be talking here about the dog with recurring allergic skin problems who needs repeated courses of steroids or antibiotics to keep flare-ups at bay, or the cat who suffers from repeated episodes of cystitis. These are the patients who may benefit from an entirely different approach, as the treatment they have

## Part Two: From herbs to homeopathy

received has clearly not been able to deal with the root of the problem.

### The right tool for the job

If the only tool you have is a hammer, every problem looks like a nail. We might turn that expression around and ask: if you have been hammering away for months or years and the effect is temporary at best, is it perhaps time to try a different tool?

The more tools the vet or doctor has at her disposal, the better the chance she will be able to cure the patient. It is never a matter of preferring conventional medicine or alternative medicine, but rather of using the approach that works best in any situation. Let me be clear that it is in no way my intention to disregard or undermine conventional medicine or, indeed, vets who practice only conventional medicine. I merely wish to point out that, in those situations, for those conditions and for those patients for whom conventional medicine has



### Complete and whole

*Holism: the idea that an individual should be viewed as a whole, and not as a collection of parts*



# Treat the patient; not the disease

## DECISIONS AT THE VET'S: THE RIGHT DECISION IS THE ONE YOU WON'T REGRET

### Be aware of all the options

The disease descriptions that make up the rest of this book are in no way an exhaustive list of possible health problems in dogs and cats. I have chosen to discuss a range of common problems because it is my experience that these are conditions where misconceptions are particularly common, or where additional treatments or products can be of such value that both vets and owners deserve to be more aware of them.

I hope to explain the wide range of tools and approaches that are available, and that can often make all the difference, even when dealing with very serious illness.

If your dog or cat suffers from one of the conditions described, I hope the following will help you to feel fully informed when discussing treatment options with your veterinarian, and inspire you to seek further help when relevant.

### Each case is different

In many cases, it is possible to argue sensibly for more than one course of action. Make sure, as discussed in the first section of this book (page 37), that you have a vet who is willing and able to listen to you, and who

you trust to be 'on your side' in the decision-making process. There are certainly situations where there is only one responsible way to proceed, but more often there will be different options, and not necessarily one single correct approach. It is even possible to think of situations where one vet would recommend conservative treatment (medication), another surgery, and a third euthanasia.

Your veterinarian has the medical expertise and experience, as well as insight into the specifics of your particular case, and should always be your first port of call. If you hear advice from friends or on social media based on others' experiences in cases that sound similar, ask your vet whether the tips are relevant in your case. Don't try to self-diagnose or self-treat. It is more common than one would think to rely on Dr Google or social media alone, and the consequences can be disastrous.

### The elusive truth

Our knowledge is constantly evolving. New diseases are discovered; new treatments introduced. Some areas are still poorly understood, and even for well-described conditions, vets may disagree on the best treatment. 'What we think we know' is certainly not a constant.

### Part Three: Dealing with disease

#### Steps for treating arthritis

- *Nutraceuticals (fish oil, glucosamines, green-lipped mussels)*
  - *Weight restriction*
- *Swimming and other suitable physical activity*
- *Osteopathy/chiropractic/physiotherapy/massage*
- *Acupuncture (possibly gold implants)*
  - *Homeopathy*
  - *Painkilling drugs*

*The above list can, to some extent, be seen as a ladder. Start at the top for the at-risk patient and work your way down the list, adding treatments as the condition becomes more severe*

you will determine what drug or combination of drugs has the best effect and is tolerated best by your dog. Be prepared to experiment. Your vet will recommend a blood test before and at regular intervals during treatment to check your dog's liver and kidney function, and ensure that the drugs continue to be well tolerated. You may need a referral to an orthopaedic specialist to get it right. Remember, no one should suffer pain, and there will be a way to relieve pain for every arthritic patient.

#### SURGERY

The following advice will help you support your animal before and after surgical procedures. It should be regarded as an adjunct to your vet's recommended treatments. If complications

