



## Exploring Holistic Veterinary Medicine



With a growing trend in the use of alternative and complementary medicine in human healthcare, so is the movement toward more natural and holistic care for pets. It is becoming more and more widely accepted that our domestic companions are like family and deserve the same quality options in healthcare to achieve and maintain a healthy and happy existence.

According to the American Holistic Veterinary Medical Association (AHVMA), holistic medicine ultimately involves creating a lifestyle that is tailored for each individual animal to establish and maintain overall well being. Techniques used in holistic medicine are based on love and respect for the animal and are minimally invasive by nature. It is a mix of healing arts and medical skills, which always seek the most natural and gentle approach to the treatment of illness.

Holistic practitioners look at the whole patient, including the environment, symptoms of disease pattern, and the relationship of pet with caregiver and create a treatment protocol using a broad range of therapies. They also tend to take a less conventional approach to the use of vaccinations and drug therapies. However, in acute cases, treatment may involve aspects of western medical technology such as surgery and pharmaceuticals used in conjunction with alternative techniques, which are complementary and help reduce side effects and speed recovery times.

Some common modalities used in holistic veterinary practices are Traditional Chinese Medicine including acupuncture and Chinese herbs, homeopathy, chiropractic adjustments, Western herbal remedies, diet and nutritional therapy, massage and aromatherapy. For a complete list of holistic modalities as well as a list of holistic practitioners by state, visit the AVHMA web site at [www.ahvma.org](http://www.ahvma.org).

People are seeing real results in alternative ways of treating and preventing illness in their pets and the demand for holistic practitioners is on the rise. Here in southeastern Wisconsin we are fortunate to have several holistically trained veterinarians available who have taken it upon themselves to continue their education to include natural approaches to health and healing. In Oconomowoc, Chris Bessent, DVM, runs her holistic veterinary practice called Herbsmith, Inc. She specializes in Chinese Medicine including Chinese Herbs and acupuncture. Dr. Bessent has used the classic Chinese herbal formulas in practice for years and was so pleased with their results she wanted to share them with other dog and horse enthusiasts so Herbsmith was born. She is also certified in veterinary chiropractic medicine for dogs and horses.

In traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) the body is seen as a balance of fluids and heat and yin/yang energy. Disease is seen as an imbalance of these factors or a disruption of meridians (cables of electricity) that run through the body and are linked to respective organs. With each disharmony in the body, there are a number of possible causes and combinations of Chinese herbs, used for hundreds of years-often in conjunction with acupuncture, help to restore balance to the body and eliminate “dis-ease.” Because in TCM the tongue reflects the status of health or lack-there-of in the body, it is the size, surface and color of the various areas of the tongue that one trained in TCM can observe to determine if/where imbalance exists.

In a typical office visit at Herbsmith, Inc., Dr. Bessent asks her clients for their canine companion's history including appetite and dietary habits, elimination, sleep, any pains, etc., and watches the dog for its own unique physical and psychological characteristics. She then conducts a tongue and pulse diagnosis to determine what is causing a particular disharmony. "If a dog is vomiting and in Chinese Medicine there are twenty disharmonies that could cause a dog to vomit, the goal is to determine which disharmony the dog has and use herbs and acupuncture to resolve it and eliminate intelligence that helps keep it healthy but it is ideal to feed a proper diet-that puts everything in your favor," said Bessent.

Bessent also offers custom herbal formulation services. On her web site, [www.herbsmithinc.com](http://www.herbsmithinc.com), a questionnaire is available for care givers of either dogs or horses to fill out and submit in order that she can assess an animal and provide a specific combination of Chinese herbs to help achieve balance and harmony. The cost of the service is a flat fee of \$45 plus the cost of the herbs, which for dogs is based on two sized containers (100gm = \$20.00/500gm = \$75.00). Herbsmith, Inc. also has a toll free number to call for information at 1-800-624-6429.

Jodie Gruenstern, DVM of Animal Doctor, Inc. in Muskego, WI, is also a holistically trained veterinarian who often conducts speaking engagements at pet shows and pet related events in our area. She specifically addresses the over vaccination problem facing our domestic animal population by promoting and conducting titer tests – creating a vaccination protocol for the individual pet vs. the common blanket annual inoculation of all pets, regardless of immunity and health status, which studies show can be damaging to a pet's immune function. The titer test is a blood test, which acts as a snapshot by which to view the current level of immunity possessed by a pet against some preventable, communicable diseases.

Dr. Gruenstern also consults with her clients about the importance of diet and nutrition. A large part of her practice involves the use of fresh whole foods, nutraceuticals (natural food based vitamin supplements formulated to enhance the body's immune function and overall health), and western herbal remedies. She is also using classic formulations of Chinese herbs and has a part time acupuncturist seeing patients at her clinic two days every other week. "We really want people to know about titer testing and the importance of diet as the foundation to health. We don't just jump right to antibiotics and steroids but we are an integrated practice – we will prescribe drug therapy when a response to natural remedies isn't seen quickly enough," said Gruenstern. You can contact Animal Doctor, Inc., for information on holistic animal care at 414-422-1300.

Both Drs. Bessent and Gruenstern refer patients to each other for specific needs that they feel the other can better address.

This seems common among holistic practitioners because the need for their services is so great. It isn't a matter of competition but rather a joining of the minds and modalities of qualified doctors to achieve the best possible outcome for each individual patient. It stands to reason that the business of holistic medicine resembles its overall mission of gentle respect for all life and fortitude for overall well-being, a philosophy that can be carried into all aspects of life.