Homeopathic principles not followed

Dear Sir,
The article "Treatment of canine atopic dermatitis with a commercial homeopathic remedy: a single-blinded, placebo-controlled study" (Can Vet J 2002;43:601–603) was a welcome surprise.

As a practitioner of homeopathic therapy, I am pleased that *The Canadian Veterinary Journal* publishes alternative methods of treating animals. It was sad to discover, though, that, in this study, a traditional approach of disease management was used and homeopathic principles were ignored. The outcome of the study, therefore, was, in my opinion, invalid, and I wish to respond to the article.

Homeopathic principles state that the patient should be treated and not his or her symptoms or clinical signs. Clinical signs are merely an expression of the disease state of the patient. This study focused only on the clinical sign pruritus, and its reduction of intensity. There was no regard for the individual, the age of the patient, the duration of illness, concurrent illness, behavioral changes, previous or concurrent therapy, nutrition, or environment.

A professionally trained homeopath would likely have found unique differences between patients and given them individual remedies, which could have changed the outcome of their illness quite dramatically. In this study, all patients were given the same remedy. Corticosteroids (which were administered to some of the patients) are known to counteract homeopathic remedies and are contraindicated, in the same way that you would not drive a car with the brakes on. Homeopathic therapy relies on a fully functioning immune system for a successful outcome.

Also, homeopathic remedies do not act as predictably as the medicines that we are used to, such as corticosteroids or antihistamines. An older animal, with concurrent illness, and many years of previous therapies will take a longer time to come back to health with homeopathic therapy than will a 6-month-old puppy. By contrast, both will likely respond similarly to a dose of steroids. Occasionally, a homeopathic aggravation occurs in patients; that is, clinical signs get slightly worse before getting better. This is not necessarily a negative sign and is likely a curative response. In this study, this occurrence would have been missed completely.

In conclusion, homeopathy can be very rewarding when its principles are respected. There are numerous over-the-counter complex homeopathic products on the market for which miraculous cures are claimed. In fact, it takes a practitioner a lot of study and experience to be effective in homeopathic therapy. Unfortunately, it is difficult to design a clinical study that takes the individuality of patients into account.

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Not classical homeopathy

Dear Sir:
One or 2 quick comments for the researchers who studied the use of a commercial homeopathic remedy for the treatment of canine atopic dermatitis (CAD) (Can Vet J 2002;43:601–603). On the surface and to the uninformed, it looks once again as if homeopathic treatment is a dismal failure. However, to someone who practises homeopathy, what is quite apparent after reading just the abstract is that the authors give no indication that they understand the basic principles behind homeopathy. The combination cocktail remedy chosen would be akin to using a combination of acetylsalicylic acid, enrofloxacin, and 3 or 4 other unrelated drugs in a

Letters to the Editor *on topics of general veterinary interest are solicited, and ongoing debate on controversial topics is encouraged through this feature. Also welcomed are letters which challenge, support, or add to articles appearing in the CVJ in the previous two months. Authors will be allowed one month for reply, so that their reply may appear with the relevant letter in the same issue, usually within two months of receipt. Letters must be signed by all authors, should not exceed 500 words (two double-spaced typewritten pages), and may be abridged and edited as necessary. Financial associations or other possible conflicts of interest should always be disclosed.*

Les **Lettres à la rédaction** sont en principe des textes portant sur des intérêts généraux pour les vétérinaires ou qui ajoutent au débat sur des sujets controversés. Ce sont des textes rédigés à notre demande, mais nous acceptons aussi les lettres qui remettent en question ou appuient les articles qui ont paru dans la Revue dans les deux mois précédents ou y ajoutent quelque chose. Les auteurs auront un mois pour répondre, de façon que leur réponse puisse figurer avec la lettre pertinente dans le même numéro, habituellement dans les deux mois suivant leur réception. Les lettres doivent être signées par tous les auteurs, ne pas dépasser 500 mots (deux pages de texte à double interligne) et peuvent être abrégées et révisées au besoin. Toute implication financière ou autres conflits d'intérêts potentiels devraient être indiqués.

study for the treatment of, say, idiopathic vestibular disease. How can one purport to know which, if any, of the drugs had any effect in positive outcomes or, perhaps, if the combination was a cause of some of the failures that are bound to occur?

What was practised here was not classical homeopathy, but rather an attempt to use a "homeopathic" remedy in an allopathic way. What was studied was not the effectiveness of a homeopathic remedy at all, because it wasn't homeopathic to each individual case.

First, in considering a case for homeopathic treatment, each case is carefully studied to discern what is unique about the way the patient is reacting to its "disease." Therefore, all dogs with CAD would not receive the same remedy. An allopathic diagnosis and prescription would be based on the clinical signs *common* to all cases of CAD, like scratching and licking, for example. The homeopathic prescription would be based on the patient's *unique* presentation of the totality of its disease signs. Second, the potencies of the remedies in the mixture used were exceedingly low and would not be expected to have any deep or long-lasting effect. Third, this was an over-the-counter product, not one that would be carefully selected by a practising homeopath.

We hope that this clarifies for your readers the reasons for the failure of this study to show treatment success with homeopathics. It might be an idea for clinical investigators to speak with a classical homeopath when designing any future studies.

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A poor test of homeopathy

Dear Sir,

It is sad to read the report of the study by Scott et al, purporting to test the effect of homeopathic remedies (Can Vet J 2002;43:601–603). First, are any of the investigators practising veterinary homeopaths certified with the Academy of Veterinary Homeopathy? Second, if these veterinarians had had a real understanding of homeopathic therapy, they would not have used an over-the-counter homeopathic combination product to carry out a scientific test of homeopathy. Homeopathic remedies are used singly and are chosen with care and study, not to treat a given "disease" but rather to address the clinical signs of illness specifically present in the individual animal; that is, one atopic dog is not necessarily treated with the same remedy as another.

This study was truly a poor test of homeopathy and does not help veterinarians to understand in any way the benefit or effectiveness of this mode of therapy. I am an allopathic veterinarian of almost 30 years of practice who discovered the intriguing field of homeopathic therapy 3 years ago by taking Dr. Richard Pitcairn's courses in veterinary homeopathy. I have treated both chronic and acute cases with homeopathy in my practice.

Unless one honestly studies classical homeopathy, it is impossible to criticize, critique, or scientifically test this discipline. As more veterinarians look at alternative therapies, I feel that veterinary journals should endeavor to publish articles that are truly peer reviewed.

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