

## Acupuncture for Animals

### PET OWNERS ARE DISCOVERING NEW USE FOR ANCIENT THERAPY

Editorial Staff

In northern California, it's being used on a brown-eyed basset hound named Beatrice to treat a recurring back problem. In Florida, it's being given to save an Australian shepherd that had lost the ability to use its hind legs. And in Minnesota, it's being performed on a fledgling racehorse named Blushing Jabar to relieve shoulder tension.

What do these three animals -- and thousands like them -- have in common? They're all being treated with acupuncture. Across North America, pet owners have begun turning to acupuncture and other forms of alternative medicine to cure their animals' aches and pains, oftentimes with results that far outweigh the owner's expectations.

What are the reasons behind the recent increase in animal acupuncture, and why are so many people using it on their pets? To answer those questions, *Acupuncture Today* presents a glimpse of veterinary acupuncture, through a variety of news sources, as it is being practiced in the United States. These events could occur at any time, in the office of any veterinary acupuncturist, and they are intended to show the phenomenal interest in a form of care that has existed elsewhere for centuries, but is only now gaining acceptance in this country.

#### Florida

Eight months ago, Mary Ann Petersen was afraid she would have to have Aussie, her nine-year old Australian shepherd, euthanized. After a pair of unsuccessful surgeries to correct hip dysplasia and slipped disc disease, Aussie was left in pain and lame from the waist down. A medical assistant in the small city of Arlington, Petersen had heard of acupuncture before but was somewhat suspicious about what it could do for her dog.

"I was a huge skeptic," she said in an article in the *Florida Times-Union*.<sup>1</sup>

That was before Petersen took Aussie to Martina Sander, a member of the International Veterinary Acupuncture Society and one of only a handful of certified veterinary acupuncturists in nearby Jacksonville.

Sander began a regimen of weekly treatments by inserting a group of needles - in some instances, as many as 20 - into specific acupuncture points that are believed to relieve back pain. The improvement seen in Aussie since her first treatment has been rather remarkable. Not only can she walk on all fours, according to Petersen, the shepherd can even lift her weight to reach up and scratch on a door to get back inside the house.

Sander admits that acupuncture isn't a cure-all, nor does the treatment work for every animal she sees. "We get them as good as we can get them. "They hold a plateau and when they decline, they come back for a tune-up," she said.

While Sander's four-legged clientele is small now - she regularly treats two dogs and a cat with

acupuncture - she expects that number to grow considerably in the future.

"I always liked the complementary side (of veterinary medicine)," Sander said. "Acupuncture is one of the more accepted modalities. It's more mainstream. My clients expect it."

## Minnesota

Founded in 1985, Canterbury Park is one of the largest horsetracks in the state. Located in Shakopee, approximately 25 miles from the Twin Cities, some 1,600 horses are stabled at the park's sprawling, 355-acre complex. As one of five veterinarians (and the only IVAS-certified veterinary acupuncturist) at Canterbury, Dr. Blake Johnson is responsible for easing many of the aches and pains that come from repeated running and overtraining, and as the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* reports,<sup>2</sup> there's a lot more to his job than meets the eye.

Johnson's patient for the day is Blushing Jabar, a filly with a sore shoulder. After applying acupressure to the hips and other points on the body, Johnson determines that the source of the horse's shoulder pain is a problem with her hind end. He inserts a needle into Jabar's upper rear leg, attaches a syringe and injects a dose of vitamin B12. The liquid puts sustained pressure on the area, which provides a lasting effect while minimizing the amount of time a needle is in place.

Pat Bends, Blushing Jabar's trainer, has noticed the effect acupuncture has had.

"One jockey pulled her out of a race because he said she was too sore to make the turn," Bends said. Once Jabar was treated by Johnson, however, she was able to make turns even on a tighter turf course. "It's done great things for my horses," Bends added.

Although he also treats dogs and cats, the majority of Johnson's practice revolves around horses. He says that horse owners and trainers have been particularly quick to embrace what acupuncture has to offer.

"In 1983, a lot of vets talked negatively about acupuncture," he said. "But we're seeing more and more acceptance and referrals now."

Other types of alternative medicine are performed at Canterbury. Many trainers use massage therapy on their horses; some also use magnets. After all, horse racing is a business where a hundredth of second can make the difference between winning and losing. And in that type of business, Johnson says, trainers will try just about anything if they feel it will make the horse perform better.

"These are bottom-line people," Johnson mused. "If you swing a dead chicken over a horse's head and he runs faster, that's going to be OK with them."

## Oregon

In the quiet southwest town of Roseburg, a toy poodle named Love Bug is receiving treatment for a back injury.<sup>3</sup> His owner, Esther Underkofler, was originally given two options, both of which were unappealing: pay \$2,500 for a surgical procedure that could not be guaranteed to work, or put the dog to sleep.

"When I came back from a trip in June, LB wasn't eating and wasn't walking at all," she said.

Faced with a dilemma, Underkofler took her prized pooch to Beth Berg, an American-trained veterinarian who learned how to perform acupuncture in Beijing. Instead of surgery or drugs, Berg

began performing acupuncture treatments on Love Bug, administering a series of 20-minute sessions designed to reduce pain and inflammation and improve the function of the nervous system.

A few weeks after his first treatment, Love Bug's appetite has picked up significantly, and he is able to walk almost as well as he could prior to the injury. His recovery, Underkofler says, is due in large part to Berg's treatment method.

"Now he is eating, he's up walking again really well," she said.

Berg takes the compliments in stride. To her, it's just the latest example of the effectiveness of a healing art that has been used to treat humans and animals for millennia.

"The Chinese have been using acupuncture for treatment and surgical anesthesia of animals for thousands of years," Berg said. "I can't cure everything with acupuncture, but I can make pets more comfortable and improve the results from Western medicines and treatments."

California

At 13, Tundra isn't as spry as he once was. Rescued from a shelter at age two, the 85-pound golden retriever's back legs started to give way recently, which prompted his owner, Sandy McMillan, to look to alternative medicine for help.

"He's getting old, and I didn't want to accept this was the end," McMillan told the *Orange County Register*.<sup>4</sup> "So I thought, why not try a new cure?"

McMillan didn't find a cure, but she found the next best thing in the form of veterinary acupuncturist Don Lundholm. Originally something of a skeptic, Lundholm became convinced of acupuncture's healing properties when a practitioner cured him of a severe case of neck pain.

"I remember saying to myself, 'Golly, there's something to this,'" he said.

Lundholm subsequently enrolled in a 400-hour program in San Diego to learn all he could about acupuncture and traditional Chinese medicine. Now a certified practitioner, he treats a variety of animals from an office in Huntington Beach. After receiving his certification, he admits that he's become much less of a skeptic.

"I used to pooh-pooh all of this, but now I'm more open minded," he said.

Forty-five minutes after it began, Tundra's treatment session is over. Lundholm removes the needles from Tundra's body, receiving a lick or two in appreciation, and gives the dog a small treat at the end of the visit. It's hard to tell who's feeling better at the end of the session: the dog or its owner.

"He's feeling more like himself; he's such a sweetie," McMillan remarks fondly of her dog. "I really don't think he minds because he knows it's good for him. It makes him better and gives him strength to get up, even on a slippery floor."

Reasons for Use Are Varied

A natural question that arises from this phenomenon, of course, is why. Why are so many people beginning to make the switch from traditional veterinary care and have their pets treated with acupuncture and other forms of alternative medicine?

To Mary Rose Paradis, the answer is rather straightforward. Many people who take their pets to alternative practitioners are often alternative care patients themselves. If people find that a therapy works well for them, they're more likely to try that same therapy on their pets.

"They (humans) find it useful for themselves, so they want the same treatment for their pets," said Paradis, an associate professor at Tufts University School of Veterinary Medicine. Tufts is one of only two veterinary schools in the country to offer a course in animal acupuncture. The first, Colorado State University, began offering its course three years ago.

According to Steven Biller, editor of Dog Fancy magazine, the increase in veterinary acupuncture appears to be part of a trickle-down effect. "It's the same with massage therapies, dietary supplements, holistic care," said Biller, whose journal has published three stories on acupuncture in the past two years. "They start in human science and they eventually move into the pet world. It's popular - really popular."

Just how popular are these treatments? According to the American Animal Hospital Association, 11 percent of pet owners have given their pets massages; seven percent have given them herbal remedies; five percent have used holistic or homeopathic formulas; and two percent have taken their pets to an acupuncturist for treatment. Those numbers may sound small, until you consider that there are approximately 350 million pets in the United States - more than one pet for every man, woman and child in the U.S.

Among the other reasons for its popularity, Biller adds that acupuncture produces the results people are looking for in a much shorter amount of time, and that it works on all types of animals, not just certain breeds.

"It absolutely works," he said. "I've seen it done on German shepherds, Samoyeds, others - it's not only for pain relief, but stress relief - good for big breeds and those suffering from separation anxiety or hyperactivity."

Science is now beginning to bear out the claims of Paradis, Biller and others. A recent article in the *Journal of Veterinary Medical Science*<sup>5</sup> examined the role of acupuncture in veterinary practice and found that the technique proved useful in treating a wide range of animal diseases and disorders, including:

- functional disorders of the reproductive system;
- anoestrus in cattle and pigs;
- retained placenta in cows;
- low conception rate;
- impotence and penile paralysis;
- dystocia (difficult birth);
- paralysis and lameness in dogs;
- back pain; and
- resuscitation due to anesthetic overdose, apnea or cardiac/respiratory arrest.

The authors of the article concluded that veterinary acupuncture "will become even more acceptable and popular in the new millennium," and that since it provides "ideal non-pharmacological care to suffering animals," it has positive implications "for animal welfare and for the production of chemical-free human food of animal origin."

Whatever the reasons, it appears that veterinary acupuncture has established itself as a uniquely effective form of healing. Granted, the requirements for performing acupuncture on an animal vary from state to state; in many cases, acupuncturists may be allowed to deliver treatment only under

the supervision of a veterinarian, or may be required to undergo additional training or certification before they can practice. Nevertheless, the increase in veterinary acupuncture represents a tremendous opportunity for acupuncturists to expand their field of practice, and signals the American public's acceptance of a form of care that was virtually unheard of a few years ago.

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