INTRODUCTION TO HOMEOPATHIC TREATMENT:
ACUTE ILLNESSES AND INJURIES

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Introduction

Homeopathy is an effective form of medicine that is based on the premise of *similia similibus curantur*, which translates as *like cures like*. Homeopathic prescribing for deep seated chronic illnesses (e.g. allergies, irritable bowel disease, pemphigus, cancer) requires extensive training and skill, but the use of homeopathy for acute illnesses and injuries is much simpler and can be incorporated into most veterinary hospitals. The goal of this presentation is to give an overview of homeopathy and how it can be successfully used in daily practice to improve the health of one’s patients.

Homeopathic and Allopathic Medicine

In order to understand how homeopathy is applied in veterinary medicine, it is best to begin with its definition and how it compares to the most common method of treatment today, called allopathy. The allopathic approach is based on ‘opposite suffering,’ which uses a medication that has the opposite effect to the patient’s symptom. If there is inflammation or fever, give anti-inflammatory medications; for bacterial infection, prescribe antimicrobials. Homeopathy is a system of medicine defined as ‘similar suffering’, and is based on the premise that the same medicine that can cause symptoms of illness in a healthy patient can cure an ill patient that is suffering from similar symptoms.

Homeopathic medicines, more commonly known as remedies, are made from plants, animals or minerals. These remedies are specially prepared through a process of dilution and succussion, so only a small, safe amount of the original substance remains in the remedy. The production of homeopathic remedies is regulated by the FDA. Remedies are dosed according to
their strength, i.e. potency, and the most well-known potency is 30c. In order to fully evaluate the patient’s response to a homeopathic remedy, it is important to only give one remedy at a time. If a patient is on other allopathic medications that cannot be discontinued, try to avoid giving them within the same time period as their effects may work against the homeopathic treatment.

**Homeopathy in Veterinary Practice**

Homeopathic veterinarians are trained to view symptoms as an expression of illness in their patients and prescribe a remedy that closely matches those symptoms to stimulate healing. For example, not every patient with gastroenteritis will have the same exact symptom pattern: the vomitus may vary, the diarrhea may be small or large bowel, and while some patients with GI distress are lethargic and weak, others become restless. It is in these situations where homeopathy becomes invaluable, because each patient can receive a homeopathic remedy that exactly corresponds to their symptoms to stimulate their body to correct the underlying cause of disease.

While there are hundreds of homeopathic remedies, there are a small number that are known as polycrest remedies. Polycrest remedies correspond to the symptomatic pattern of many common diseases, and thereby are the most commonly used homeopathic remedies in daily medical practice. In a homeopathic practice, three dogs may be demonstrating signs of gastroenteritis, but each dog will receive a different remedy that is an exact match to their symptoms. The following are three imaginary patients that have been created to demonstrate how characteristic symptoms result in different polycrest homeopathic prescriptions.

Fluffy, a Poodle that presents with symptoms of vomiting, increased thirst and dark stools that contain blood and green mucus will be treated with *Arsenicum album*. Fido, a Labrador that vomited twice after he ate a pig ear is now anorectic, thirstless and flatulent. He is eructating frequently and acting very clingy with his owner, which is a change from his normal, confident demeanor. Fido’s homeopathic remedy is *Pulsatilla*. Frankie, a French bulldog that vomited his breakfast, is acting painful on palpation of his cranial abdomen and straining to defecate, but passing small amounts of feces. Normally a friendly dog, he growled at the owner when he was picked up, and is hiding under the chair in the examination room. Frankie’s homeopathic veterinarian would prescribe *Nux vomica*. In each of these examples, the homeopathic
prescription is based on the symptoms the patient is exhibiting, as well as any shifts in behavior that are different in sickness than in health.

Homeopathy is highly effective in the treatment of injuries, promotion of wound healing, pain management following trauma, surgery, and dental procedures, as well as acute illnesses such as gastroenteritis and upper respiratory tract infections. In most cases, homeopathic remedies are effective enough to be the sole prescription for the patient, making antibiotics, steroids, or anti-inflammatory medications unnecessary. In the following paragraphs, we will review situations where homeopathic remedies can be used for common injuries and illnesses, and in the final section of this paper, cured homeopathic cases will be presented. While this presentation focuses on the homeopathic treatment of dogs and cats, homeopathy is also highly effective in horses, farm animals, and pocket pets.

**Administering the Remedy**

The most commonly available strength of homeopathic remedy is 30c potency. Remedies are usually found in vials in health food stores, and contain small milk sugar pellets that have been coated with the homeopathic medicine. On average, a single vial costs less than ten dollars, and contains approximately twenty doses, making homeopathic treatment a simple and affordable medication to stock in a veterinary clinic.

Homeopathic remedies are most effectively absorbed trans-mucosally, i.e. directly from the gums into the bloodstream, rather than being chewed or swallowed. To administer a dose, dispense three pellets from the vial into the cap and dispense them into the patient’s lip fold between the patient’s cheek and gums, or directly into their mouth.

The following is a list of polycrest homeopathic remedies that are valuable to keep on hand for acute treatment, followed by a brief description of the use of each remedy:

- **Arnica** – Trauma, injuries, shock, pain.
- **Arsenicum album** – Vomiting with diarrhea, bloody diarrhea, with increased thirst, restlessness. Often useful for dogs with the above symptoms that have eaten something rotten.
- **Belladonna** – Heat stroke.
Bellis perennis – Pain to deeper tissues, often needed following abdominal surgery when organs were greatly moved around.

Calendula – Wound healing, promotes healthy granulation tissue; Traumatic corneal ulcers.

Drosera – Infectious tracheobronchitis when the cough is harsh, honking, spasmodic, and can cause the patient to vomit.

Hypericum – Analgesia following dental extractions, torn nails, puncture wounds.

Nux vomica – Vomiting, gastric reflux, constipation or diarrhea, with irritable or withdrawn behavior; the patient is better after vomiting.

Pulsatilla – Vomiting, diarrhea, with thirstlessness; often noted when the gastrointestinal symptoms came on after eating high-fat foods. Also useful for infectious tracheobronchitis and other upper respiratory affections, especially when there is green or yellow oculonasal discharge. Patients become clingy, are better in open air (outside) and when consoled by their owners.

**Steps to Homeopathic Prescribing**

Homeopathic prescribing is individualized for each patient. Instead of prescribing a medicine that is given on a schedule for a certain number of days, a single dose is administered and the patient is monitored for the response. Once a list of the patient’s symptoms has been made and matched to a remedy, what can be expected from the patient’s response to treatment?

The first change that suggests a favorable response is an improvement in the patient’s general well-being. For a restless patient with diarrhea, she may lie down and rest comfortably. A painful cat with a bite wound may stop guarding the injury and tolerate a gentle exam. A dog that is weak and lethargic from vomiting will show improved energy. A heat stroke victim’s fever will drop, their pulse normalizes, and the color of their mucus membranes shifts from red to a healthier pink.

The next response to a fitting homeopathic remedy is an improvement in the symptoms that are being monitored. This does not mean that the symptoms immediately vanish, but they gradually lessen in their severity or frequency. During this time period following the remedy, it is difficult not to repeat the remedy on a set schedule, or with the idea that more doses will hasten the process. On the contrary, repeating the remedy before it has finished acting can
interrupt the healing process. Once the symptoms being monitored stop improving, or start to worsen again, the remedy should be repeated. In the veterinary clinic, this can be done by careful observation of the hospitalized patient. At home, owners can be given a list of symptoms to monitor and given instructions on when to repeat. In most cases of acute illness, a remedy may only need to be given a total of two or three times to promote a complete return of health within a twenty four hour time period.

**Homeopathic Prescribing for Post-Operative Pain**

Controlling pain following elective procedures such as spays, neuters, and dental extractions is an important part of post-surgical recovery in our patients. There can be a delicate balance, however, between controlling pain and creating side effects that slow recovery time from anesthesia and surgery.

In our practice, surgery patients are administered Arnica as soon as they are sternally recumbent, and doses are repeated by the owner at least every four hours as needed for pain, up to two days post-operatively. In addition, they receive a back-up treatment option in case the Arnica is not effective enough to control their symptoms, which is either a different homeopathic remedy, or an oral NSAID. In the majority of cases, the Arnica is very effective.

Dental patients that have teeth cleaned with or without extractions are administered Hypericum once they are sternal, and doses are repeated by the owner at least every four hours as needed for pain. Depending on the invasiveness of the procedure, they may also receive a back-up treatment option, either another remedy or oral NSAID.

In this practitioner’s experience, the use of homeopathic remedies to control post-operative pain has resulted in smooth recovery and excellent analgesia without concern for the undesirable side effects that can accompany opioid use, such as sedation, decreased gut motility, and dysphoria. The homeopathic remedies are easy to administer as they do not require pillling or food to hide the pills, and the owners are pleased with their pet’s recovery.

**Case 1:**

Grissom is an eight year old, 100 lbs. neutered male Lab/Shepherd mix that presented on September 22, 2014 to evaluate symptoms of pain, lameness and anorexia following vehicular trauma the previous day. He was struck along his right shoulder by the side of the car, which
was traveling at an estimated speed of 45 mph. The owners reported that he was urinating and passing stool, and no blood noted. Following the injury, the owners had administered Aspirin orally with no improvement in his pain.

Abnormalities on physical exam included slow, stiff gait, lethargy, and soft tissue inflammation palpable on the right shoulder and extending caudally along ribs that was painful to touch. At a walk, he demonstrated weight bearing lameness with shortening of stride of right forearm. Grissom’s diagnosis was traumatic, soft tissue and muscle injury to right shoulder and ribs. Arnica 1M (high potency) was prescribed in a multi-dose vial. The first dose was administered, and owners were instructed to monitor his energy level, appetite, gait and lameness. They were instructed to repeat a dose at bedtime and phone the following day with a progress report. Twenty four hours following his first dose of Arnica, the owner phoned to report that Grissom was doing great. He did not need any more pain relief after the bedtime dose, his appetite had returned to normal, and they were having trouble ‘keeping him down’ as he was feeling so well. Grissom’s owner commented that she was very impressed with his response to homeopathic treatment.

Case 2:

Shadow is a 7.5 year old, 95 lbs. intact male German Shepherd that presented on September 29, 2014 to evaluate intermittent vomiting that started over the previous weekend after he ingested Bella’s (housemate dog) vomitus Saturday morning. Both dogs received a large rawhide on Friday, and Shadow may have eaten both of them. Shadow became ill the morning before the exam: he ate grass, then ate his breakfast, and then proceeded to vomit his undigested breakfast with the grass within thirty minutes. He had vomited at least seven times since then, predominately bile and grass. He had not eaten any food in twenty four hours, and was only drinking water. There had been no vomiting since the night before, but he was depressed and anorectic.

Abnormalities on physical exam included pain upon palpation of the cranial aspect of the ventral abdomen, with no obvious masses or fluid wave appreciated, and a behavior change from being out-going and playful, to acting listless, not interested in food or being around people. The owner noticed an increase in water consumption since the symptoms started. Shadow was not febrile.
A diagnosis of gastritis was made, with suspected rawhide ingestion as the primary cause. The owner was advised that intestinal obstruction had not been ruled out, and that if Shadow did not respond to treatment or his symptoms worsened, abdominal radiographs would be needed.

Nux vomica 200c (one potency level higher than 30c) was prescribed in a multi-dose vial and the first dose was administered at the visit. The owner was instructed to hold the additional doses and not repeat unless instructed to do so. She was asked to call in four hours with a progress report, and to monitor energy level and thirst. She was to have water available, but not offer food until instructed. The progress reports are listed below:

- Owner phoned: 9/29/14 at 3:45 pm – Shadow is doing better; he has more energy and is acting more normal. There has been no more vomiting. Advised owner to feed ½ normal amount and phone with a progress report in two hrs.

- Owner phoned: 9/29/14 at 5:47 pm – Shadow ate and did not vomit. Passed a stool that was slightly loose, with mucus. Advised the owner to repeat the Nux vomica only if he vomits overnight, or the stools progress to diarrhea and to phone with a progress report in the morning.

- Owner phoned: 9/30/14 at 9:30 am – Shadow is doing great! There has been no further vomiting; he has good energy and appetite. Advised owner to call if symptoms return. No further doses of Nux vomica were needed.

**Case 3: Sunny**

Sunny is a 4 year old, 87 lbs. neutered male Labrador Retriever that presented on May 5, 2014 for exam following adoption from a local dog rescue. Sunny had a large wound on the anterolateral aspect of his left metatarsal measuring 4 cm wide by 6 cm long with inflamed, excessive granulation tissue present. The wound was treated topically and bandaged at his neuter the previous week by the rescue group veterinarian. Concern for slow wound healing and the risk for a lick granuloma were discussed with the owner, the wound was treated topically with diluted Calendula tincture and re-bandaged. The owner was instructed to purchase a dog
boot to protect the bandage and deter licking. In addition, Calendula 200c was prescribed for once daily administration for three days to promote granulation tissue and wound healing.

Sunny was re-evaluated on May 9, 2014 for bandage change. The center of the wound was pink and moist, as was his neuter incision, which suggested evidence of licking. The owner was reminded to purchase a boot to cover the wound and to use an E-collar to deter licking. Bandage changes using Tegaderm hydrocolloid dressings were demonstrated to owner, and she was advised to continue Calendula 200c once daily for two weeks.

Sunny was re-examined on May 30, 2014 to evaluate the wound healing. On exam, the wound on his left metatarsal had nearly filled in with granulation tissue, with less than 2 mm remaining between wound margins. The owner was advised to give Calendula 200c on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, and to discontinue bandaging, using only a Walking Wheels boot to protect the wound from licking.

June 19, 2014 Sunny’s leg was re-evaluated, and it was concluded that the wound had completely filled in with granulation tissue, and was re-growing fur in the affected area. The Calendula was discontinued, and the owner was very pleased at how nicely the wound had healed.

**Becoming a Veterinary Homeopath**

Veterinarians wishing to become veterinary homeopaths can enroll in *The Professional Course in Veterinary Homeopathy* through the Pitcairn Institute of Veterinary Homeopathy. This is an intensive, comprehensive course that holds five sessions (each four days in length) over the course of a year, totaling 130 hours of classroom work as well as independent study in between each session. This course is taught by Richard Pitcairn, DVM, PhD, who has instructed more than 500 veterinarians in homeopathy since the early 1990’s, and experienced veterinary faculty instructors who have completed the professional and advanced courses in veterinary homeopathy. Once a veterinarian has completed the course, they can pursue certification with the Academy of Veterinary Homeopathy and become a Certified Veterinary Homeopath (CVH). The next course begins in September of 2015, in Portland, OR. Further information is available at: www.pivh.org