

Dr. Jeff Feinman, CVH
certified veterinary homeopath

phone-203.222.7979
fax- 203.227.3231
drjeff@homevet.com

Integrative veterinary medicine and homeopathy

Background

My career in clinical veterinary research began back in 1980 at the Animal Medical Center. As a University Scholar (in a dual degree program) I had already been doing human molecular biology research at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine (published topics included the role of hormone receptors in cellular communication, aging, and cancer). I had therefore become well versed in critically analyzing data and perceiving what worked and what did not.

As an intern at Angell Memorial Animal Hospital in Boston and then as an emergency clinician in Connecticut, it became even more clear to me which therapies were clinically most effective. I was always investigating new treatments, and had an active relationship with Norwalk Hospital. This was often the only source for the drugs which I learned about at the annual American College of Veterinary Internal Medicine meetings.

I was the first (and only) person in the state authorized to use 4-methylpyrazole when it became clear that this was a lifesaving emergency room drug. The FDA authorized my use of this investigational new drug only after close scrutiny of my credentials as a veterinary researcher and clinician.

It was during this experience that I began to realize that the most effective treatments for our patients are sometimes not taught in veterinary school and are only accessible to those who search.

My introduction to integrative medicine

Soon thereafter I saw a client whose dog had debilitating arthritis. He had stopped responding to NSAIDs, and we were about to start him on low dose corticosteroids. This woman told me about her personal experience with rheumatoid arthritis. Her rheumatologist had recommended trying omega-3 fatty acids (fish oils) before other cytotoxic therapy (in this case methotrexate) was started. After a few weeks her joints felt better than ever and she was even able to discontinue her other medications.

This intrigued me, so we tried it with her dog even though there was no “documented evidence” of its use for this purpose. His arthritic symptoms markedly improved, just like those of his owner. This response spurred me to start investigating the literature for this and other natural supplements. I was amazed by what I found.

Apparently there were many other ways of treating disease that I had never been exposed to at Penn, AMC or Angell (or even at those ACVIM lectures though a few years later omega-3 fatty acids started showing up in some clinical studies and are now an “accepted” therapy).

Thus I started integrating this and other natural therapies into my practice. Integrated medicine is practicing in a way that **selectively** incorporates elements of complementary and alternative medicine into comprehensive treatment plans alongside traditional methods of diagnosis and treatment.

Rather than just rely on the tried and true drugs and protocols I had already learned about, I found that incorporating these “unorthodox” therapeutic measures markedly improved my patient’s level of health. Basically I was using those therapies that I saw working in the clinic.

Why homeopathy?

I found that by strengthening my patient as a whole (rather than addressing specific problems), gradually their symptoms would resolve and not return. Through these years of holistic practice and literature reviews I learned about other modalities that treated the whole patient rather than just the disease symptoms.

I read about the law of similars and the use of microdoses of homeopathic remedies. These ostensibly strengthened the body without any toxic side effects. Frankly it was a little too weird for my scientifically trained mind to accept.

In the late winter of 1997 I developed a severe shoulder injury which was not resolving no matter what I did. I decided to try the homeopathic remedy Bryonia. Within a week my shoulder was back to normal. I didn’t really think the homeopathic medicine had anything to do with it. I figured that I just recovered spontaneously.

As the weeks went on my shoulder continued to be fine but I was also noticing something odd. My annual seasonal allergies never materialized. Typically I would need to take high doses of antihistamines and inhalers several times a day to control the severe respiratory symptoms. Usually come springtime I could not function, let alone work, without them.

It took me awhile, but I hypothesized that the homeopathic remedy which I had taken for my shoulder injury must have done something to me which resolved my previously intractable allergies. At first I really couldn’t accept that conclusion. I waited expectantly through Spring, Summer and Fall for my problem to recur. During that time I began to read further about

homeopathy and use some remedies on my own pets.

I learned that homeopathy had been formalized as a system of medicine in the 1800s in Germany, Physicians as far back as Hippocrates had been treating based on its principles however. In the US, homeopathic treatment became especially popular in the late 1800s when homeopathic physicians saved most of their patients during the yellow fever epidemic. The majority of conventionally treated patients died. Further epidemics of flu, cholera, etc. were treated equally successfully using homeopathic medicine.

It became clear to me while reviewing the literature that this must be a powerful therapeutic modality to have saved so many patients during epidemics of such high morbidity and mortality. I still had trouble believing that such microdoses could actually work, but as a scientist I wouldn't dismiss it just because I couldn't understand it. After all, seeing is believing.

I was also very surprised to learn that not only did homeopathy work clinically, but the FDA "approved" of it. In 1938 they recognized the homeopathic pharmacopeia as the legal equivalent of the allopathic (conventional) pharmacopeia. Manufacture of homeopathic remedies became government regulated just like other drugs. This is not the case for the vitamin and supplement industries. Again the evidence pointed to the conclusion that homeopathic treatment must somehow be more powerful and/or effective than other alternative therapies.

In the meantime I was studying homeopathic principles (there are lengthy professional veterinary courses for doing such) and starting to use them in my patients. I would treat one pet conventionally and another, with the same problem, homeopathically. I found that not only did my homeopathy patients recover but they did not tend to relapse or develop related chronic diseases (similar to the improvement in my allergies when my shoulder was treated).

I learned that this was because I was treating the underlying imbalance which caused the symptom rather than just treating the symptom itself. Of course it was great that my patients were getting better (which they often would with conventional therapy as well) but as a scientist I was especially excited that my treatment was now based on underlying principles.

The majority of our practice today is based on "what works", or what others (usually authorities in the field) do (and then publish). I remember a recent lecture on feline hyperthyroidism given by Dr. Mark Peterson. He asked the audience if we knew why we used Tapazole at the recommended dosage. He was proud to inform us that it was because he thought it might be a good idea (based on extrapolation) and that it was almost exclusively his clinical experiences which popularized this therapy.

Now this may not seem odd because we rely so heavily on this type of information. Most therapeutics are actually based on this kind of trial and error. Look at chemotherapy protocols or how we sometimes accidentally find novel uses for older drugs. Wouldn't it be nice if we could predict *in advance* whether a particular drug or treatment was going to be effective. This is

exactly what homeopathic principles allow.

Understanding homeopathy

Homeopathy differs from allopathy (conventional medicine) in possessing a precise set of principles governing diagnosis and treatment. Homeopathy has always adhered to a set of assumptions about the functioning of the organism in health and disease, and the effects of the medicines used to treat disease.

Homeopathic principles have been successfully tested in practice for about 200 years. Clinically therefore their scientific validity has been well demonstrated.

The purpose of these principles, and of the rules of practice emanating from them, is to enable the physician/veterinarian to discover for each sick patient the medicinal substance which most closely meets his needs.

Homeopathy views the living organism as unceasingly reacting to its environment. Thus, what is called “sickness” represents the organism straining (physiologically) in response to a stress (infectious organism, toxin, accident, etc.). The patient’s symptoms are the visible result of this straining. The symptoms therefore are an excellent externally visible clue to what is happening internally.

From a homeopathic perspective symptoms are beneficial. Symptoms are not the disease. Although some symptoms can clearly be distressing or painful, we never try to eliminate a symptom in and of itself. The homeopathic physician sees his task as promoting the curative effort of the organism thereby reducing the symptoms.

Homeopathic principles show the veterinarian how to assist the animal in this self-healing effort. They are a *set of rules* enabling him/her to select the medicine which, when administered to the patient, will facilitate self-healing.

The first of these rules is that the medicine must be prescribed according to the “law of similars”. This means that the appropriate remedy for each sick person is the substance which would give rise to precisely the same set of symptoms if administered to a healthy person.

The concept of treating with similars is very ancient and was resurrected in the early nineteenth century when Jenner used cowpox vaccination as a preventative for smallpox. The “similar” cowpox was seen to confer immunity against smallpox. To this day we use similars for conferring immunity whenever we give a vaccine.

Not only infectious agents, but any substance in the world produces its own specific and peculiar set of symptoms when administered to a healthy individual (a “proving”). Samuel Hahnemann was led to his discovery of the rules of homeopathy by his curiosity about the reason for the

curative effect of quinine in malaria. He experimented on himself and found that taking continued doses of quinine caused the typical symptoms of an attack of malaria.

From this he postulated that quinine is curative in malaria through its ability to generate the typical symptoms of the disease.

Proving yield groups of symptoms which define precisely how the healthy organism reacts to the specific stimulus of a homeopathic remedy (medicine). These symptoms indicate how the given substance is to be used for treatment. Since the symptoms of the sick animal represent the curative reaction (physiologic strain) in response to some stress, the most effective way to cure him/her will be through prescribing the substance that can temporarily intensify these curative symptoms (as determined from provings).

When confronted with a sick patient, therefore, the homeopath first elicits all of the symptoms. This is a much lengthier and more complex process than the traditional anamnesis. Then the physician investigates the literature of the provings to ascertain precisely which substance produces a set of symptoms identical with that of the patient. The accurately chosen remedy will intensify the incipient healing process. The patient's symptoms represent the commencement of this healing process, and the medicine will help continue (and hopefully cure) these symptoms.

Secondly, the homeopathic physician must use the "minimum dose". The reason for this rule is easy to understand. When medicines are employed according to the principle of similars, a large dose will tend to exacerbate the patient's existing symptoms. The minimum dose however will effect a cure without a severe aggravation of the patient's symptoms.

This second point is where most of the controversy regarding homeopathic treatment has arisen. How can a therapy which utilizes such miniscule (often unmeasurable) doses be effective? Hahnemann discovered clinically that by employing lower and lower doses (starting with thousandths and millionths of a grain) his patients recovered faster and without undue aggravations.

This phenomena which Hahnemann observed was partially explained after his death by the Arndt-Schult law. It says that minimal doses of a drug stimulate, medium doses inhibit and large doses destroy cellular activity. How homeopathic medicines are effective at doses even below Avogadro's number can best be explained by quantum mechanics and the newly discovered "memory" of its' water vehicle.

The third basic "rule" of homeopathic practice is the use of a single remedy at a time. This is the one medicine that best meets the needs of the patient as determined by the symptoms. Because initiation of the healing process is often signaled by very subtle changes, using one medicine at a time enables the homeopathic physician to best evaluate the patient and know exactly what is working and what is not.

These are the three basic Hahnemannian “rules” for prescribing. 1-the law of similars, 2-the minimum dose, and 3-the single remedy.

By successfully applying these principles, the dysequilibrium causing visible (or biochemically measurable) symptoms improves. As the underlying issue is resolved, the symptoms go away.

This difference in perception has never kept homeopaths and allopaths from working together. In fact, in Europe, many human hospitals have homeopaths working side by side with their conventional colleagues. Referrals back and forth are the rule, not the exception and everyone involved benefits.

Managing the hospitalized homeopathic patient

In the hospital setting the goal, as always, is to help our patients in whatever way we can. Therefore in a life-threatening acute illness such as a trauma *any therapeutic means possible* should be taken. Nowadays however most of our hospitalized patients are suffering from a flare-up of some chronic illness, e.g. with fluid loss from recurrent diarrhea or vomiting, hyperglycemia due to uncontrolled Diabetes Mellitus, fever of unknown origin, etc. where heroic measures are usually not necessary.

When a patient who is being treated with homeopathy (and not critically ill) needs to be admitted to the hospital (or even when out-patient diagnostics are being performed) there really is only one difference in the way s/he should be handled from the conventionally treated patient. As mentioned previously, homeopaths consider symptoms to be invaluable windows into the internal disease process (and how the individual’s body is dealing with it). It is therefore best to only **support the body as it heals rather than to try to eliminate these symptoms.**

Discharges, inflammatory reactions (including fevers) and other evidence of reaction by the body should not be stopped with steroids, antibiotics or topical therapy. The only exception is in a life-threatening emergency.

A simple example would be a patient (say with pancreatitis) who is getting intravenous fluids and bland feeding. If this patient developed a severe otitis or skin eruption a homeopath would view this new symptom as directly related to the underlying disease. We therefore would never try to directly eliminate it. The best course for the non-homeopath to take in this situation would be to just continue supporting the body in its’ healing efforts and report the new symptom.

Can homeopathy help my practice?

There are many reasons to incorporate homeotherapeutics into a conventional practice. The first,

and most obvious is where there is **no effective conventional option**. I see many referrals where this is the case. On a daily basis we find ourselves unable to come up with a cure, or even a treatment, for both acute and chronic diseases. Many of these clients come to me as their last resort after almost everything else has been tried and failed.

Many of my patients come to me seeking relief from **drug side-effects**. As we know, many drugs can be toxic and some have narrow therapeutic ranges yet need to be used to reduce distressing symptoms. Homeopathic medicines have no such toxicity or side-effects.

Sometimes the clinical situation, such as pregnancy, lactation, impaired renal or hepatic function makes the **conventional option unsafe**. Homeopathic medicines are completely safe in these areas and can be used without risk of toxicity in severely compromised patients.

Many chronic conditions can be treated with conventional drugs with good control of symptoms and improved quality of life. However these patients may eventually suffer from the long-term drug therapy. We therefore frequently use regimes which involve the smallest amounts or shortest courses of these “necessary” drugs. Homeopathic remedies can be used in this situation to **allow lowering of the other drug doses**.

Last, but not least, there are a growing number of **clients who are requesting** nontoxic or holistic options for their pets. I work hand in hand with conventional practitioners all over the country to help manage patients whose owners want to use homeopathy but where the local vet is not trained in this modality. Rather than lose these clients to other practitioners altogether, these veterinarians offer referral to a homeopath similar to referral to an internist, surgeon, etc.

Thus we see that it was my training as a scientist that allowed me to keep an open mind, critically evaluate the research and gradually arrive at a truly integrative method of helping my patients. The guiding principles of homeopathy have enabled me to understand both why my patients become sick and how best to treat them. Finally, as the need and demand for integrative veterinary medicine grows it is incredibly gratifying to be able to use these principles in healing the sick.