



# Main Street Veterinary Services

2360 Main St., PO BOX 211  
London ON N6P 1P9  
[www.mainstreetvetservices.ca](http://www.mainstreetvetservices.ca)  
519-203-2000  
info@mainstreetvetservices.ca

Reprinted with permission, by: Nancy Scanlan, DVM, CVA

## What is Holistic Veterinary Medicine?

Holistic (or Integrative) Veterinary Medicine is the examination and diagnosis of an animal, considering all aspects of the animal's life and employing all of the practitioner's senses, as well as a combination of conventional and alternative (or complementary) modalities of treatment. When a holistic veterinarian sees a pet, besides giving it a comprehensive physical examination, he/she wants to find out all about its behaviours, distant medical and dietary history, and its environment including diet, emotional stresses and other factors.

This mixture of healing arts and skills is as natural as life itself. At the core of the issue lies the very essence of the word "(w)holistic." It means taking the whole picture of the patient- the environment, the disease pattern, the relationship of pet with owner – and developing a treatment protocol using a wider range of therapies for healing the patient.

The holistic practitioner is interested in genetics, nutrition, family relationships, hygiene and stress factors. Many patients present in a state of "disease." At this point the holistic challenge lies in the question "why?" By a series of analytic observations and appropriate testing the goal becomes finding the true root source of the pathology. A simple appearing symptom may have several layers of causation. Only when the true cause of the ailment has been found is there the possibility for a lasting recovery.

It is at this point that the most efficacious, least invasive, least expensive, and least harmful path to cure is selected. In many acute situations, treatment may involve aspects of surgery and drug therapy from conventional western technology, along with alternative techniques to provide a complementary whole. This form of treatment has great value for severe trauma and certain infections. It often out performs other methodologies. It is also at this time that other treatment plans such as those listed below are brought into use. Once the symptoms have been treated, the task is not complete until the underlying disease patterns have been redirected. The patient, as well as the client, will be guided to a new level of health.

## **Modalities Used in Holistic Veterinary Medicine**

### *Modern Drugs, Surgery and Diagnostics:*

A holistic veterinarian selects the ones which best conform to holistic traditions. They stay current on the latest advancements.

### *Acupuncture, Traditional Chinese Medicine:*

Acupuncture has been used in China for 3500 years. It is the main treatment for a quarter of the world's population. Thousands of years of acupuncture treatment prove its efficacy. Current research also verifies its effects.

The primary aim of veterinary acupuncture is to stimulate the body's adaptive—homeostatic mechanism, to relieve pain and to improve the function of organ systems by stimulating acupuncture points on the surface of the body. Acupuncture treatments elicit responses which decrease pain and regulate physiological processes. Acupuncture practice spans from ancient Chinese knowledge to state-of-the-art electrodiagnostic instrumentation.

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) believes that Qi (pronounced "Chi"), the vital force that flows throughout the body, travels along channels of energy flow called meridians.

Acupuncture points along the meridians are treated whenever a disease condition exists that blocks the normal flow of energy along these meridians. TCM also believes that disease often is because the body's natural processes are out of balance (excess or deficient). The aim of TCM is to bring a body back into balance using acupuncture or herbs.

### *Behaviour Modification:*

This incorporates ethology, biology, nutrition, pharmacology, lifestyle evaluation and aspects of modern psychotherapy. Every discipline listed here affects behaviour (particularly homeopathy and Bach Flowers, but also herbal medicine), disease and health. Humane considerations are often at stake.

### *Detox, or detoxification:*

All bodies have waste products that build up at times when the liver can't process them. Initially they are stored in the fat, but may spill over into other parts of the body. Drugs or toxic substances may also be stored there. Too many of these can cause chronic inflammation or disease. Detox is a process which helps the body eliminate them safely.

### *Herbal Medicine:*

Herbal medicine is a system of treatment utilizing whole plants and plant extracts in the treatment of disease and maintenance of health. Whole plants provide a broad spectrum of desirable effects, from specialized nutrition (herbs contain vitamins and minerals that drugs do

not) to synergy of the various components, which may allow lower doses of pharmacologic ingredients to be used. They can also reduce side effects of drugs.

Herbal medicine also recognizes that certain traditional methods have validity today. For instance, almost nothing but nutrients in conventional medicine allow the practitioner to safely strengthen chronically ill patients, while herbalists utilize tonic herbs as well as nutrition for this purpose. Herbal medicine has always recognized the whole body approach and that the mind and body interact in health and disease—this knowledge is reflected in the use of herbal adaptogens and alternatives.

Various cultural systems of medicine (such as Chinese, and western European) may be used in diagnosis and prescription, in addition to current scientific knowledge. Herbs are unique in “complementary and alternative medicine” because we have a tradition informing us about their use, often dating back thousands of years. Herbalists use ancient knowledge and modern science to develop treatment plans for their patients.

Herbal medicine requires that the herbalist be aware of the world around us, because the tools of the trade and the environment in which they grow may be endangered by indiscriminate use. Good herbalists are conservationists and are often active in sustainable agriculture and medical initiatives worldwide.

Becoming involved with plants as medicine transforms veterinarians. They become aware of broader clinical effects when herbs are used, even as they become aware of the broader global effects related to their new interests. Herbal medicine is healthy for doctors as well as for pets.

#### *Homeopathy:*

Homeopathy dates back to the Father of Medicine, Hippocrates. Samuel Christian Hahnemann, a German medical doctor in the mid-1800's, developed the system we are using today. Homeopathy works on the principle of “Similia Similibus Curentur”, or “like cures like.” When a large dose of a toxic substance is swallowed, it can produce symptoms of illness, but when a homeopathic, diluted, minute dose of the substance is given, it can reverse those same symptoms. In a similar way the drug digitalis in large doses will cause heart problems, whereas in small doses it can help heart disease.

Homeopathic remedies are made from plants, minerals, drugs, viruses, bacteria or animal substances. These remedies do not mask or suppress symptoms; they treat the deepest constitutional causes of the illness.

### *Homotoxicology*

Homotoxicology was developed by Hans-Heinrich Reckeweg, MD in the 1950's, as a way to choose homeopathic remedies by using modern medical diagnostic methods. It emphasizes detoxification as an important part of the healing process.

### *Laser Therapy*

Low-level laser light influences a number of processes in the body. It is especially good at stimulating healing, decreasing inflammation, and relieving pain.

### *Mega-nutrients, Augmentation Therapy:*

Sometimes known as Orthomolecular Medicine, it uses supplemental minerals, vitamins and nutrients that correct deficiencies, prevent pathology and reverse tissue damage. Supplements are prescribed that support the organs and body tissues, aid body detoxification and give energy to assist in the healing process.

### *Nutritional Therapy:*

Proper nutrition is the best preventative medicine. Each pet patient is different and may need a different diet or additional supplements for optimum health.

### *Trigger Point Therapy*

A trigger point can weaken a muscle by as much as 30%, and can cause both local and referred pain. Trigger point therapy will help release the trigger and provide instant relief. Owners can learn to perform this themselves.

### *Veterinary Chiropractic:*

Chiropractic can be used to treat conditions involving the spine or muscle groups affected by spinal problems. It is especially good for senior pets with difficulty in standing or walking. In chiropractic, the problem area of the back or neck is identified and through hands-on specific adjustments the problem is alleviated.

Virtually every form of medicine and therapy used in holistic medicine for humans exists for veterinary medicine. Many have programs which provide certification, or continuing education which enables veterinarians to keep up with the latest discoveries and techniques. The new and the old combine to make the future of veterinary medicine a healthier, more humane endeavor.