

BY RONNA KABLER, D.V.M.

This is an introduction to a series of articles on holistic care. The intent is to provide you with information to open your world to choices in care for your companion animals and family. I am suggesting that holistic care can be the first line of action in optimizing the health and well being of our PBGVs, and not the eleventh hour desperate quest for help when all the conventional options have failed to restore health, as so often happens. In these articles the following questions will be addressed: What is holistic medicine? How does it differ in principle and practice from conventional medicine? What are the healing tools used in holistic medicine? What are outcomes of some real cases treated by holistic means? How can holistic care be applied to raising healthier PBGVs?

**WHAT IS HOLISTIC MEDICINE?** The definition in Webster's dictionary of holism: *"A theory that the universe and especially living nature is correctly seen in terms of interacting wholes (as of living organisms) that are more than the mere sum of elementary particles."* The definition in Webster's dictionary of holistic: *"Relating to or concerned with wholes, or with complete systems rather than with the analysis, treatment or dissection into parts."*

It is implicit in the theory and practice of holistic medicine that the patient is evaluated and treated as a whole individual, greater than the sum of his parts, with his own unique set of characteristics. All aspects of the individual are taken into consideration during evaluation and treatment, including emotional and physical issues, previous medical history (illnesses, surgeries, medications, and vaccinations), genetics, life style, relationships, diet, etc. The holistic practitioner may use any of the "alternative" or "complementary" modalities as well as more "conventional" treatments as necessary. The ideal treatments address the totality of the patient and enhance the individual's own healing process in a gentle manner.

Holistic theory assumes that health and well being is the normal state of the organism, and is not just the absence of disease. Disease is not an inevitable. However, tragically, over time, we have tainted our world with toxins, radiation, adulterated food, etc., and

this has impinged on our health and the health of all living organisms.

There is an energetic component in all living organisms that orchestrates the individual's life functions, including growth, maintenance of normal functions and repair. This intelligent energetic force has been recognized in most cultures and healing systems for centuries. This energy has many names: chi to the Chinese, prana to the Hindus, and vital or life force in the Western world. Many holistic treatments influence this energetic or life force to stimulate healing, such as acupuncture that helps to unblock channels so the chi can flow through the body's meridians, or homeopathy which impacts directly on the vital force to muster up its healing forces in the body.

This energetic force responsible for life makes sense with the current knowledge in physics that energy precedes matter. There are inherent natural laws in how the life force handles disease in the body. Symptoms are the expression of the individual's vital force. They are the manifestation of the vital force's attempt to expel the disease from the body and to restore health. Symptoms are an essential aspect of healing. Strategies (as well as the functions of the immune system) include localization, such as an abscess or tumor, and discharging (vomiting, diarrhea, skin eruptions, ear, eye, nasal discharges). The life force always tries to put the disease in less vital organs (such as the skin) and away from the more vital organs such as the brain and heart. Cure follows a natural progression in the body, from top to bottom, from front to back, and from inside to the outside (more vital organs to less vital organs).

Symptoms expressed by the individual over time are usually related to one disease or mistunement of the life force, not a series of unrelated events. (The exception is infectious disease and injuries; however, the response of the individual to the infectious agent or injury is unique to him and depends on his susceptibility or defense mechanisms.) The symptoms are only the expression of the disease, not the disease itself. The disease itself is often much bigger than the symptoms. For example, a chronic ear "infection" is one symptom of an underlying mistunement, not just an isolated

problem with the ear. This principle is essential to understand in seeking a cure for the patient.

The holistic practitioner recognizes that the presenting set of symptoms may only represent the tip of the iceberg of the animal's disease. She gathers all the information she can to try to get at the ultimate causation of the illness and put together a treatment plan to try to address the disease at its core. With a chronically ill animal, this usually takes time, as over the years the disease becomes more complex and layered in its expression. One can use the analogy of peeling of layers of an onion in healing the animal. Holistic therapies work with the individual's inherent ability to heal itself rather than overpower it with strong drugs or surgeries.

**HOW DOES HOLISTIC PHILOSOPHY DIFFER FROM CONVENTIONAL/ALLOPATHIC THEORY?** To answer this question, one must first have an understanding of allopathy on which conventional medicine is based. The definition of allopathic from Webster's dictionary is: *"Relating to or being a system of medicine that aims to combat disease by using remedies (such as drugs or surgery) which produce effects that are different from or incompatible with those of the disease being treated."* In other words: *"Treatment of disease using medicines whose effects are different from those of the disease being treated and which have no relationship to the disease symptoms. Allopathy is based on the principle of contraria contrariis or the Law of Opposites."* (from *Yasgar's Homeopathic Dictionary*).

Allopathic/conventional medicine has its basis in materialistic philosophy, which translates into the patient being viewed as a combination of chemical and mechanical processes, not unlike an automobile. The patient is fragmented into processes, or body parts, that are treated as unrelated entities. Allopathy does not recognize that disease is a unified malignant entity unique to the individual; it views illness as a series of fragmented events. The allopathic doctor doesn't recognize, for example, that itching skin eruptions occurring on the puppy is the same disease as the seizure disorder which occurs when the dog is a year old.

So, in reference to the above definition, allopathic/conventional treatment involves the use of dissimilar drugs or surgery with the goal of suppression or palliation of symptoms. Suppression is the eradication of symptoms; palliation is the elimination or

easing of symptoms during treatment. However, as soon as the treatment is stopped, the symptoms return — for example, use of NSAID (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs) to treat arthritis. In any system of medicine, oftentimes palliation is the best we can do for the chronically ill patient. Suppression of symptoms, on the other hand, can lead to serious problems. For example, the symptoms might go away, but overall the patient feels sicker. Suppression of symptoms does not equate with cure. In fact, suppression of symptoms can lead to the disease going deeper into the body and making the patient sicker. For example, the suppression of eczema leading to asthma has been known for hundreds of years, yet modern medicine doesn't recognize this phenomenon. Another obvious problem with the use of powerful medications, either singly or in combination, is the medicinal disease created in the body, otherwise known as side effects. Side effects can range from annoying to life-threatening. If a patient is taking multiple medications, the impact on the body can be staggering.

It is natural for us all to want a "quick fix" when we are ill or in pain. Allopathic medicine is very successful in providing these quick fixes with strong drugs and surgeries. And, of course, it is often necessary in life-threatening situations. Even in more benign situations, it is intolerable for all of us to watch our animal itching non-stop or exhibiting any number of painful or alarming symptoms. The problem is that the quick fix is just that: The drugs may stop the symptoms, but do nothing to address the underlying disease process. So what ends up occurring is the symptoms at that time go away (suppression), but the disease is still present, even though may be latent, and will express itself again in a more serious fashion. Note that many holistic treatments can work even faster at healing an animal than conventional drugs, and have the added benefit of no side-effects or not making the animal sicker.

In allopathy, the doctor usually has to have a diagnosis to be able to treat the patient. Though a diagnosis is important, there are some problems inherent in the necessity of giving a set of symptoms a name. First, a diagnosis is sought, even sometimes to the detriment of the patient. I call this "chasing pathology." The patient is diagnosed with a specific disease and treated the same as all other patients with that particular disease classification or set of symptoms. This goes against holistic theory, which treats every patient as an individual. Not everyone with the same diagnosis

exhibits the same set of symptoms. Often the diagnosis, and thus the treatment, is based on pathological findings (tissue changes). The problem with this approach is the pathology is the end result of the disease process, NOT necessarily the cause of it. Often by the time there are significant tissue changes, it is very late in the course of the disease. Also, this may lead to backwards interpretation of disease. For example, is it possible the lesion in the tissue is the result of the mistunement in the body, NOT the cause of the symptoms?

**IN SUMMARY.** The holistic practitioner treats every patient as an individual; uses gentle modalities to help stimulate healing in the patient; can treat illness at an early stage before tissue changes occur; strives to actually cure the patient, not just suppress symptoms; avoids the use of powerful drugs; understands symptoms are necessary for the patient to heal and uses the symptoms to guide the treatment. The holistic healer understands there is usually one “mistunement “ that can be manifested in many ways in the patient, and that it is NOT a series of different diseases.

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