

Announcer 0:12

If you want a wildly healthy, naturally disease-resistant pet who turns heads and starts conversations with awestruck onlookers, you're right where you belong. This is the Vital Animal Podcast with your host, homeopathic veterinarian, Dr. Will Falconer.

Will Falconer, DVM 0:36

Welcome back. This is Dr. Will Falconer. I'm so glad you've joined us today. We're going to deconstruct a little bit on homeopathy for you, take it out of the black box that it seems to often be in. It's confused with other modalities and I'm recommending it to many of you when you've got some chronic problem. But what does it actually look like to go through the process of getting to cure with a homeopathic vet helping you? So, I've long recommended homeopathy as your best approach to treating your sick animals, especially if those animals are chronically ill. Which, by the way, is the norm for both animals and people on the planet these days. So, just a quick review, chronic stands in opposition to acute. Acute are those short-lived illnesses, rather, like an injury or sudden vomiting or diarrhea from eating bad food. Those are expected to be over within hours or days. Food poisoning is a classical example. You wouldn't expect to be sick with food poisoning for a month, right? But the chronic diseases are different in that they are stretched out over time and often last a very long time, months or years, very common. So, homeopathy is my best recommended approach to getting these things cured. And let's talk about what is homeopathy briefly first. And then, how will it look if you find a genuine homeopathic vet and you set about working to cure your loved ones?

Will Falconer, DVM 2:19

Alright, so what's this thing called homeopathy? First, maybe, what it's not. It's not a synonym for all things natural. It's not a synonym for holistic, which might mean anything that's natural and taking a broad approach to health. It's not herbs, although some homeopathic remedies start out as herbs. And it's not acupuncture. It's not manipulation of the body, pressing on the spine, etc. It's not diet changes. And it's not avoiding vaccines or pesticides used to treat all manner of pests. While some of those things may be broached in a homeopathic consult or in the course of a consult with a homeopathic veterinarian, they are not the homeopathy part.

Will Falconer, DVM 3:11

So, what it is is a very principled system of using medicine to cure the sick, founded by Dr. Samuel Hahnemann in the late 1700s. These medicines we call remedies are made in very specific ways. First, there's an ultra-dilution that happens in a very stepwise fashion. So, if you've been at the store and you've seen a remedy on the shelf, it's often something with a 30C next to its name, say *Arnica montana*, very common remedy for injury. Next to that is 30C. That means it's been diluted stepwise 30 times as follows. C stands for centesimal, or one 100th. So, 1C is made by taking one part of a tincture of arnica, in this case, the herb arnica in tincture form, and adding to that one drop 99 drops of water with maybe a little alcohol to start with. And then from that 1C vial, a drop is taken out and put in a fresh clean vial and 99 more parts of the diluent, the water, are added to it. That's now a 2C. Likewise, from that vial, a drop can be taken into a third clean vial and 99 more drops of diluent, or water, are added. So, you can see, by the time we reach 30C, by the time that's done 30

times, that is so ultra-diluted that it's completely nontoxic, no matter how toxic the starting material was. And it's very, very safe. It's diluted beyond the point of physicality. If you give that remedy to someone on a lab bench and say, "Find how much arnica is in this pill or in this solution," they'll say there's none. There's just the background sugar tablet or there's the background water and alcohol, if it's a liquid remedy. So, no longer physical and very much energetic at this point.

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Now, along with this dilution, at every step, there's this thing called succussion. Succussion means hammering that vial with the remedy and the diluent in it at each step of dilution. This is done typically in homeopathic pharmacies, sometimes by machine, sometimes by hand. So, each step of dilution gets a strong rapping, typically about 100 times. And mostly, all these remedies that you'll find in the marketplace today are made by HPUS compliant pharmacies, or something on the other side of the world that's synonymous to it or similar to it. So, these regulators control how these remedies are made. They're not made in a basement and slapped a label on and sold. They're very controlled for procedure to make the remedy, cleanliness, etc., safety, etc. So, you've likely seen these tubes in health food stores or on Amazon. They're about the size of your little finger. They're typically filled with round, baby size pellets. Sometimes they come in liquid form, but most commonly you'll see tubes, and they're arranged from arsenicum and arnica down at the A's, all the way through sulphur and zincum at the far end. How are these remedies chosen? They are based entirely on the symptoms your animal, or you, if you're seeing a human homeopath, is displaying. The symptoms are the guideposts as to how your animal is suffering, and we use these symptoms in choosing remedies. The principle is called "like cures like," meaning if something can create symptoms when taken repeatedly in crude form, it can cure those same symptoms and the sick in these tiny altered, diluted doses.

Will Falconer, DVM 7:36

But what's it like getting a homeopathic vet involved? What is a visit to a homeopathic vet, or working the process of getting to cure for your animal? What's that look like? Well, first and foremost, it's going to involve you more than any vet visit you've ever been on before. Why? Because we can't talk to your animals and get those symptoms ironed out. You can never drop your animal off at a homeopathic vet and say, "I'll be back, I'm going shopping, I'll be back in an hour to pick him up. You figure out his remedy." We have to know about symptoms. What are these things called symptoms? How do they look? So, an intake for a first visit typically takes 60 to 90 minutes, sometimes longer, where we go into every system of the body, from behavior to digestion to respiration to musculoskeletal things. How is this animal living in the world? What sorts of symptoms do we find? We'll also go into some depth about, what history did this animal have? We want to know how he suffered his past illnesses, what that looked like. Not just the diagnostic labels of them, because not everyone with Parvo suffers the same way, or not everyone with an injury recovers in the same way. So, we'll want to know what that looked like. And we'll go into great detail with this. So, if you tell us, "Well, he's had a chronic eye discharge," we'll say, "Which eye? Has one been worse than the other?" Or, "What color is that discharge? Has it ever been green? Yellow? Or just that dirty brown stuff in the corners? Is there any time involved in when that symptom is more prominent? Does the diarrhea seem to return after midnight every night?

Or is it an afternoon or a morning thing?"

Will Falconer, DVM 9:31

In my clinic, it used to look like this: very informally, we'd sit down, I'd be at my computer and my client would sit on the opposite side of the desk from me. And the dog or cat would be free to wander the room. And I got to observe, out of the corner of my eye, as I asked all these questions, how that animal responded to being in a new place. Was the dog restless and whining and couldn't wait to get out of there? Was she hiding under mom's chair? Was the cat finding its way to the back of the bookcase and cramming in behind the library, the darkest hidey hole it could get to, or was it climbing up on my lap saying, "Let me help you type that there, Dr. Falconer"? I've had both extremes. And why is all that detail important? It's really because homeopathy is designed to treat how your animal is sick, not a broad diagnostic category. How your animal suffers her sickness is the key. It's a very individuated response to the illness and a very individuated prescribing. So, that intake typically includes a physical exam, and less likely some other diagnostic means. We may ask for those further down the road, or they may already have been done. But typically, an intake will involve a physical exam and an extensive history and a give-and-take about symptoms.

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And the remedy itself can take several forms. We might give a single dose, that's a very common thing to do, give a single dose of a remedy, and watch the response over a period of weeks. We may give something daily, or daily for a week, or we may give a few doses and watch and wait after those few doses have been given. It could be in a wet form, it could be in a pellet form, that part doesn't matter. But that's all part of the prescribing. So, you could see variation there, depending on your prescriber. And ultimately important is follow-up. So, before we leave, we'll schedule a new appointment for you. And the question, whether on the phone or here, coming back into the clinic, is, what changed? Since we treated Sadie with this remedy, what's new, what's better? What's not? Have there been any new symptoms that have arisen? Or maybe any old ones that you've forgotten to tell me about that you now remember, "Oh, yeah, she used to do that back when she was two, saw a little bit of that come back"? And the next remedy in the course of getting this animal cured is based entirely on what we learn from that next visit. And so it goes in this process until cure is reached. We base our prescribing solely on your dog, or your cat, and how they have responded to treatment. So, there's nothing set in stone. It's a very malleable thing, depending on how your animal shows us changes.

Will Falconer, DVM 12:51

The goal. What's the goal from all this? Well, we want to cure this animal. Let me define "cure" for you, because it's a really, almost unknown thing today, unless you're visiting a qualified homeopath. Cure is defined as not only do the symptoms of the disease subside, they're extinguished, in Hahnemann's terms—they go away as the disease is extinguished. And what we're left with is an animal who is better, not only for not having symptoms, but better overall. Let me give you an example. I was digging through my files recently and saw a video I recorded in my office of a heartworm-positive standard poodle, a rescue dog with just a horrible history. Joined this man who had three other dogs in his household. This dog had been used as a breeding dog and locked away, I think in a garage or a kennel, for way

too long, not living a normal dog's life at all. So, I'm treating this animal for heartworm. That's the chief complaint. But I'm treating the dog, not the heartworm. So, I've prescribed based on asking all about this dog. Not only that he's heartworm positive, that's the least important thing to prescribe on. But everything else about this dog—how's his stool, how's his behavior, does he have reverse sneezing or does he cough, etc., etc. Eye discharges, you name it.

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Well, it came out on his intake that this dog had no confidence. He would let the other dogs in the house steal his food. If the owner took him to a dog park, he was glued to this guy's knee. He wouldn't go out and venture and get excited and do any of those normal things you might do off-leash at a dog park. And he had heartworm and there was probably a couple other symptoms. So, what's amazing is that, as this guy went to negative, I think it took him about three or four months of work, probably one remedy a month, single dose remedy, watch for a month, get back to me. And he would bring him in. I got to see this dog. What's phenomenal is that he changed not only from heartworm-positive to heartworm-negative, but he changed his entire persona. This dog came out of his cavern that he was hiding in, and would now, if his housemates tried to steal his food, give them a warning growl. And they now totally respected him. He rose in stature from probably the lowest on the totem pole to somewhere in the middle or near the top. His confidence bloomed. And in fact, one of the most striking things was when he was at a dog park, he was now initiating play and chasing dogs down in a fun way, not aggressively, but in a fun way, whereas he would not interact with them at all if they were strangers. So, he came free from all this baggage that he lived with, from his upbringing. And he came to me for heartworm. But because we treated the whole dog, the whole dog got well. And we defined him as a cured patient when he was negative and very confident.

Will Falconer, DVM 16:24

So, cure is one outcome of any treatment, possible with some and not with others. Another common outcome that you'll see, especially with conventional medicine, is called palliation. I'll have an entire episode on the costs of palliation, which is, unfortunately, the medicine of our day. But palliation is defined as, symptoms get somewhat better, as long as the medicine continues. So, remember, a cure, we could stop—I may not have mentioned this. Another definition of cure, not only does the whole animal get better, but they stay better when we stop giving the medicine. No medicine, continued wellness. Palliation does not stay well: when the medicine stops, the symptoms return. So, we'll see this over and over again in conventional medicine. They're given meds for their sore ears or their inflamed ears. And they're better for a while. But then, they stop the medicine and they go about living their life. And lo and behold, another episode strikes. And over time, typically these get more serious. That's the second possibility for any modality of treatment, whether its natural or not natural—palliation. I found palliation very common when I was an acupuncturist. I had to keep treating these animals to keep them not being lame or keep them well. Suppression is the third possibility for any modality of treatment, whether we're talking homeopathy or drugs or anything in between. Suppression means a treatment is given and the symptoms entirely disappear, often rather quickly. And they probably will not show up again. But in time, more serious, deeper disease emerges.

Will Falconer, DVM 18:25

So, I'll give you an example of that. I had a patient years ago who had a very large tumor hanging from, I think it was his side, somewhere on his abdomen. And it was growing slowly, my remedies were not working well to keep this thing from growing and to even get it to disappear. And at one point, the husband just said to his wife, who was interacting with me, "I'm tired of this thing, I want to get it lopped off. Let's bring it to a surgeon." And I warned the owner that that would be entirely suppression. That's all surgery can do, if we're not talking about mending a broken bone. Taking a symptom and throwing it in the trash can, a physical thing and throwing it in the trash can, is 100% suppression. And I said, there's going to be a cost in this, besides whatever you pay the surgeon to take this thing off. The dog is going to get worse at some point. What happened was, this came about the time I moved from Hawaii to Texas. We kept up a time or two by email and maybe a phone consult or two. But about a month or two later, I don't remember the exact interval, the tumor now gone, the skin sewed together, the dog became paralyzed in the rear end, first dragging, so you'd hear the toenails clicking on the concrete, and then finally completely lax in the rear end, dragging the hind end, needing a cart, etc. So, I was not surprised by that. That's a common outcome of suppression.

Will Falconer, DVM 20:04

So, cure, palliation, and suppression, they're each different. And it's important to know that conventional medicine, never—capital, bold—never cures chronic disease. It's incapable of it. And you've likely noticed this if you've had any chronically ill animal on treatment from a conventional vet. You've also likely noticed, if you've been under conventional treatment, that things tend to get worse the longer that treatment continues. Conventional treatment not only doesn't cure, but the disease slowly smolders and grows over time. So, let's talk about what's going on there. Isn't this all just really a placebo response? This homeopathy, it's so diluted, it's not even physical. It's got to be impossible for any kind of response to happen. That's what the naysayers to homeopathy will say, right? Well, animals are a perfect proof that this is not placebo response. In other words, if it were, all any practitioner would need is a large jar of blank pellets, no remedy on them, just the sugar pill. And we know placebo response does happen, people have been measured as having a 30% placebo response—if they think they're getting treated, 30% of them will get better without the drug given to them, just some kind of a blank treatment. But does this happen in animals? It does not. Life would be very simple if it were, we could just give the blank pellet and see all our patients cured. When in fact, animals are very, very innocent and very simple. And if they're given a remedy that's not a match, not the "like cures like" remedy that we're looking for, they will not get better. And they will tell us that. Their owners will say, "Well, didn't get much change from that remedy. And you know, it's been a month and we gave it just as you directed, really nothing's better." So, we then have to go back to the drawing board and reanalyze this case and say, "Well, let's see, let's look at it from another angle. Let's go back over the history. Let's go back over everything I've learned about this animal and see if there's a better remedy to try." And it's not unusual to have to sort through several different remedies to get a remedy that hits the spot, you can say, for this animal. So, they are very much a disprover of "placebo is the only explanation for how homeopathy could possibly work."

Will Falconer, DVM 22:48

A bit about time, because we've been fooled in conventional medicine thinking that illness should get better right now. Turns out in nature, that never happens. So, if you are bringing a chronically ill dog, let's say, to your homeopathic vet, whether it's by telephone or you're lucky enough to have one near you, a common question will be, when did this start? And if you say, "Well, he was itchy from about two years old, started mildly chewing his feet, scooting on his butt," whatever it looked like. And he got hot spots a year later and got smelly skin somewhere along in there. And now, he's six years old. So, it's been four years since this dog has been itchy. The expectation is that it will take about half the amount of time that disease has been present, or in this case, two years, to cure this chronic illness. That's how nature works.

Will Falconer, DVM 23:54

And so, we've been fooled in conventional medicine by seeing powerful drugs given that make symptoms disappear quickly. The classical use of steroids—prednisone, dexamethasone, etc., or our latest one, Apoquel, for the itchy dogs, work suddenly. Well, why do they do that? They're not curing the patient, as you've noticed if you've been on either one of these drugs, but they suddenly make symptoms disappear. This is a suppression going on. So, we're just bearing that symptom with a drug. And it doesn't last, it comes back. Overall, it's likely palliation if we're giving something repeatedly. But the animal's not better overall, but that symptom just disappeared quickly. That's not reality. And that's far from cure. So, when you go to a homeopathic vet expecting your chronically ill animal to be cured, you have to give it time. It'll be entirely a process. This is not a one visit, one wonder remedy. It will always take more than one remedy, but never more than one at once. So, we'll choose the best remedy, we'll give it, we'll say, "Let's talk in three or four weeks and see how we've done with this remedy." And we'll evaluate carefully how we've done. And that process is repeated until we see that the patient is cured.

Will Falconer, DVM 25:28

So, let's wrap up. This is a time-tested medical modality, homeopathy is. It's one of the few I know of that can cure chronic disease. So, I recommend it to anyone suffering anything chronic. And it's very safe with this ultra-dilution. But at least in chronic disease, it is never DIY. It's not do-it-yourself. Curing chronic disease takes training, it takes experience, and it takes hard work, quite frankly. Again, there's never a one remedy wonder where a chronic disease is cured. And it's also entirely individual, which is appealing when you think about it, because we're going to involve you in the process. We've got a triad going of animal who's sick, you who know this animal's sickness and how she responds, and the prescriber as the third part of the triangle, trying his or her best to find the remedies that bring her to cure. So, how she responds to each given remedy determines her course of treatment. That's challenging, and it's not ever do-it-yourself. Be realistic about the time it's going to take, as we mentioned, and be ready to have your knowledge of your animal honored, because you're our window to this animal's suffering, right? You live with these symptoms, you know what they look like. And if I have a couple bringing me an animal, I ask for both of their viewpoints. What does it look like? Have you seen a time that things are worse during the 24-hour cycle? Maybe one of the couple sees it and the other one doesn't. That's totally fine. I'll take both.

Will Falconer, DVM 27:22

In the show notes for this episode, I'll have some links to help you help the process by identifying these things called symptoms. I'll have a link to help you choose a qualified homeopathic vet. And if there's any vets listening, I'll have a link to the same training that I took back in 1992, the professional course in veterinary homeopathy, which was life changing for me. So, all the best to you and those innocents in your care. This is Dr. Will Falconer. Until next time.