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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 to the Vital Animal podcast. This is Dr. Will Falconer, and thank you for taking the time to join me today. We've got an interesting episode today, because we're going to talk about something that can serve you and your animals, really, no matter what form of prevention or treatment you choose.

0:57

Today we're talking about symptoms. I unpacked a bit of what constitutional homeopathic prescribing looks like in Episode 20. You may want to review that if you haven't heard it yet. But let's start with two big questions to lead us off. First, why do conventional veterinarians and human docs get it so very wrong about symptoms? And second, why do homeopathic practitioners so highly value these very same symptoms? By the end of this episode, you'll know those answers clearly. And you'll know how to track your own animal symptoms as a tool to help them stay healthy and vital. So let's dig in.

1:41

First and foremost, what are symptoms, and who or what makes them? Symptoms are the perceived or visible signs that disease is brewing in your animal or yourself. Technically, the word "symptoms" is used only for humans, who can describe their feelings. For example, "You know, I no longer have any interest in conversation. I just would rather be alone." Or, "I have a sharp pain in my lower abdomen after I eat. It feels like a hot poker." Or, "My energy is really low when I wake up in the morning, but I seem to get better by afternoon each day."

2:24

Whereas "signs" is the term more usually used for animals, especially in conventional vet medicine, because they can't talk to us as directly. So examples of signs would be, "The whites of Rover's eyes are red now. That's abnormal. They used to be white; now they're red." Or, "Sadie has a green discharge from her left nostril." Or, "Precious vomits hairballs two to three times a week, and it seems like they're coming more in the morning."

2:58

But to tell you the truth, we homeopathic vets still use the word "symptoms" over "signs," because our work is based on human reference material. And that's really the operant word there, so that's what we'll speak of now. But understand that those two are pretty much interchangeable: symptoms and signs.

3:17

So where do they originate? We homeopaths speak of the vital force, that non-physical part of all living beings that directs the many invisible processes in all of us. Things like extracting oxygen from every breath of air, or healing a bruise or a cut, or digesting food and eliminating the waste taken in, detoxifying. Just myriad processes that help us keep

alive and healthy, whether we are aware of them or they work automatically behind the scenes. The chiropractors have a similar term, and they speak of the “innate intelligence.” Which I really like, because this is innate to us. It's not something we participate in or learn. We're born with innate intelligence, or we're born with a vital force. Ayurveda speaks of Prana, and TCM, Traditional Chinese Medicine, speaks of the chi. Well, they're all pretty much talking about the same thing here. So that's where symptoms come from.

4:25

And what do they mean? What do “symptoms” really mean? Well, symptoms of any kind are there for only one reason: the vital force is trying to get the individual back to balance. To be well. That's the job of this innate part of every living being, from the lowest plant and bacteria, to the wild animals, to the humans. The presence of symptoms means the vital force is, in my words, “talking to us.” Saying, in essence, “You know, I'm just trying to get well here, so I'm making these symptoms to help get balanced again.”

5:04

The problem is conventional vets typically see symptoms as the disease. Perhaps we all grew up this way unless we grew up with the good luck of having homeopathic parents. In my case, I grew up having sickness every winter. I'd get at least a couple of painful earaches that kept me home from school, and usually a flu -- or maybe two. Well, I grew up in Wisconsin, aka the Dairy State. And back in the 50s and 60s, in my growing-up time, there were so many dairy cows in Wisconsin that they outnumbered the next three states combined, which were I think probably California and Vermont and maybe one other. So there were a lot of cows. And guess what the recommended diet advice was? And what I had was? Two to three glasses a day of cold milk. Boom! In a cold Wisconsin winter, I was still drinking cold milk. And I only learned years later that I was likely allergic to that pasteurized homogenized junk.

6:14

Whenever I was ill, if I had a fever, I always got aspirin. Mom would crush the aspirin between two spoons, because I couldn't swallow it in those days, and mixed it with -- guess what? Sugar. Who knew anything about immune systems or the fact that sugars shut it down? That's how we did it. And you know, I never felt better after taking aspirin. Have you ever noticed that? Later in life, when I started treating my own illnesses and trying things like NyQuil if I was sick, again, I never really felt better from medicines like that. I even once in vet school took an antibiotic when I had probably a similar sort of a cold or a flu or something, after I was taught what amazing lifesavers they were. I never felt better. Nor did I hasten my return to wellness that I could tell.

7:15

So I get it. We don't like symptoms. As a society, we don't like symptoms. They make it obvious that we are sick. And they're uncomfortable. But worse yet, they can make you look like some kind of a sadist if your dog or cat has sores and bare spots, or is wearing a collar to avoid damaging her itchy allergic skin. I had a client once who would only walk her dog at night because the poor dog looked so horrible from loss of hair and sores and that sort of thing while we were working to get it homeopathically cured. So society views symptoms

wrongly. Let's just face it. So you have to be a bit of a contrarian to see that differently. But I'm here to tell you today how very important it is to do so.

8:06

And the biggest mistake that's made around symptoms is thinking that making symptoms disappear is actually curing disease. Let me say that again. A common thought, especially in conventional medicine, is that making symptoms go away is actually a cure. So this "disappearing act" of symptom suppression is all conventional medicine typically does. Have you noticed that?

8:35

And we'll talk more about this thing called "palliation" one day. But know for now, the definition of palliation is: While using any drug -- or we can broaden that to say, while using any treatment of any kind, natural or otherwise -- symptoms subside. But the animal is no better overall. The symptoms have just lessened, and once that treatment has stopped, symptoms return.

9:03

Let me repeat that as well. It's important to understand this. Palliation means: while using any drug or any kind of treatment, symptoms lessen, but the animal is no better overall. And when that treatment is stopped, the symptoms return. The classical example that many of you likely know is Apoquel for itchy dogs. Which, by the way, is still after 15 years or more the number one reason dogs see veterinarians: they're itchy. Suddenly, within hours of taking a dose of Apoquel, the symptoms of itch go away. Talk about a selling point! And if you haven't been aware of the side effects from this approach, the biggest one seems to be cancer of one kind or another.

9:54

So when you're on vitalanimal.com, my website, look up Apoquel, and you'll see my very most popular blog post called "Apoquel: Dog Miracle Drug With a Dark Side." And I'll also have that in the show notes. And since this is episode number 24, you can find the show notes very easily by going to VitalAnimal.com/24. That's simply VitalAnimal.com/24. I'll have a link to that article for you, among others.

10:27

So the price for this mistaken understanding called palliation is the disease gets slowly worse, the longer palliation goes on. Be sure to view some of the 500+ comments on my Apoquel post, as the side effects can come on rather early in the course of treatment. Yes, some come after years of treatment, but some come surprisingly early. This is a powerfully suppressive drug.

10:57

In homeopathy, we seek a better outcome. Rather than palliate, we go for something called "cure." A very different definition. Cure is defined as: Not only do symptoms subside, but the patient is better overall, and continues to be well without the continued use of medicine. That's worth repeating. In cure, not only do the symptoms subside, but the patient is better in every way. And it continues to stay that way without continuing the use of medicine.

11:33

So, how does a homeopathic practitioner get his patient properly treated? Well, we never treat a condition or a diagnosis. And by the way, that's what allopaths do, right? Allopathy means using something different than the disease, whereas homeopathy means using something similar. We'll come to that in a moment. But that's what happens, commonly. We play that game called, "Name that diagnosis." And then, whatever it is, here's the treatment: one size fits all.

12:06

In homeopathy, we only treat a sick individual. And each one will show their illness, whatever its diagnostic label or name, uniquely. Symptoms will vary, patient to patient, even if they're under the same umbrella of this diagnostic label. And how do we homeopaths judge what remedy to best use to get our patient moving to cure? Guess what? It's symptoms. That's why we spend so much time on our first intake appointment and keep a running list of symptoms. They are the sign posts, or the red warning flags waving at us, telling us how this individual is ill.

12:48

So that first question should now be answered, right? How do conventional vets and single-species doctors get it so wrong with symptoms? Really, there are two ways. First, they view them as the disease instead of the warning flags that the vital force is working to regain balance. And second, they seek to make symptoms go away, by any means possible, and think that once they do this, they've got cure. Both are huge mistakes that cause untold suffering in the world, whether we're talking animals or humans.

13:25

And there's nothing new about this, of course. If you dig into the "old school" medicine, historically you'll find this, from leech use to giving crude, poisonous mercury to patients, or making an ulcer disappear by carving out the flesh on either side of it. Yes, they actually did that in the early days. The vital force was dissuaded from making more of the ulcer and had to knit together these scalpel slices on either side of it, so the ulcer went away.

13:58

So why do homeopathic vets prize symptoms so highly? Very basically, we rightly see symptoms as the "how" the patient is suffering their disease. And we also know from at least the 1700s that symptoms can lead us to proper remedies to help the patient cure their own disease better. Remember, symptoms are the sign that they're trying. When we find the right remedy, all it does is prompt a better response.

14:28

So we've got some history here. All homeopathic remedies have what's called "provings" that originated in the late 1700s with Dr. Samuel Hahnemann. He challenged a scientific paper he was translating that said that malaria was cured by Peruvian bark, simply because it was a bitter herb.

14:50

He said, "Well, wait a minute. All bitter herbs don't cure malaria, and we've got a lot of

herbs that are bitter. So what's going on here?" So Hahnemann actually did an experiment on himself. He was healthy, but he took some doses of Cinchona, or this Peruvian bark. And he noticed at a certain point in dosing himself that his body was producing symptoms that were very similar to what malaria patients suffer.

15:19

Light bulb moment for Hahnemann. If a substance can produce a symptom in the healthy, those same symptoms can be cured in the sick by using that substance. "Like cures like" had been rediscovered by Hahnemann, as it was earlier recognized by Paracelsus, a physician during the Renaissance who emphasized the value of observation.

15:46

Well, today we've got thousands of these "provings" made on all sorts of substances, whether they're herbs or metals or toxic venoms. And they were mostly all done by doctor volunteers, whose symptoms were recorded and are available to us today to look up in books called Materia Medica.

16:07

So, why do we value symptoms, again? They, when carefully observed, are the way we can accurately choose remedies that will prompt our patients to fight the "better fight" and overcome their illness.

16:21

Let me give you a case example that likely you can relate to. Maggie was a patient of mine who was a three-year-old Chihuahua mix. She was an intact female. She came to me from another state, so we were on the phone for her appointments. And she came with the commonest reason dogs see vets: this horribly itchy skin. She was often an 8 or a 10 on the 10 scale of degree of worseness; one being normal, 10 being non-stop. It affected her feet, her ears. She had body odor. She had big bare spots with no hair. And she had repeated hotspots, which are these red, oozing spots of inflammation.

17:05

We began Maggie's homeopathic treatment in December of 2015. We made some progress. For instance, she started bringing the ball again. Her digestion improved; she had a couple symptoms there that went away. And the itching lessened, but it would change, and periodically she would get right back to where she started on the itch level. It was her most common complaint in her appointments by telephone. Sometimes when I'd ask Connie to put it on the 10 scale, she'd say, "It's a 20." You can imagine how frustrating that was to live with.

17:42

Finally, seven months into prescribing, Maggie's owner related to me that she got sick for several days before each heat cycle. Quote, "She's feeling feverish and being off her food. I don't know about other dogs, but it does make her feel sick." I emailed her back, and I said, "Please tell me more about this, because this could unlock her case." Connie wrote and said, "Yeah, she always acts sick at her heat time. I thought it was normal. It is usually just for the first few days and starts the day before. A very warm feeling. She either misses

meals or only eats part of it, and lays around and won't play. She acts sick. Then after the first few days, she goes back to normal."

18:31

Well, with that new symptom info, I was able to prescribe better for the whole Maggie, and finally cure her itchy skin. So you see the importance of symptoms better, now? What do heat cycles have to do with itchy skin? Nothing directly. But in homeopathy, remember, we're not out to treat itchy skin, even if that's the most horrible symptom presented to us.

18:58

By the way, let me just interject here that skin symptoms, if you're working with a homeopath, are nearly useless to pay a lot of attention to. The skin can only do so many things. It can get red, it can smell bad, it can weep, it can be dry, but all of that rarely leads us to the proper remedy to cure it. So we only seek to cure the sick individual. And we need to know how that animal is not well. And in Maggie's case, it meant also that she was not well in her reproductive system. When we take all of the symptoms into account that describe how your animal is not well, we can cure the individual constitutionally -- whole dog or whole cat, that idea -- and expect the symptoms to subside as the whole animal becomes well.

19:48

So let's wrap up by getting really practical. First, remember the terms "common" vs "normal." Dr. Andrea Tasi and I discussed this on a couple of episodes. The very last one, episode 23, we talked about it a second time. There are lots of common symptoms out there: cats who vomit hairballs, dogs who need their anal glands emptied by hand, Cockers who get funky ears, or Persians with runny eyes. But none of those is normal. And so, they are signs that tell us your animal's working on something.

20:27

Now, how can you use this information practically? Well, here's a little something you may want to start: I would suggest you start a symptom diary, even if you haven't yet hired a homeopathic vet. Here are some things you can track that are symptoms of chronic disease. You can ask, how often does my cat vomit? Or, does my dog smell doggy? Is there an odor especially prominent when she gets damp, like getting caught in a rain shower? Does either of them lick their feet intently or chew between the pads, or the bottoms of the feet, or anywhere around the feet? How about stools? Are they really stinky? Does the whole household know when one cat uses the litter box in the house? Another is shedding year-round; that's abnormal. Others include crazy fears, or scary aggression.

21:25

There's a longer list for you in the show notes. Again, this being Episode 24, you can find it at VitalAnimal.com/24, where I'll link to a post I made with lots and lots of these symptoms that may be common, but are not normal. And that can go in your diary.

21:46

So your diary can track not only the symptoms for work with a homeopathic vet, but for any other modality you choose. So for example, say you've gone onto a raw diet from kibble. Did

the stool stop getting so stinky? Great! Itching skin lessened as well? Super! Maybe that's all you'll need to do for now. Or say you gave CBD oil. Are some skin tumors shrinking away? Oh, that's fantastic! Keep track of that. Or maybe you explored acupuncture. Are the joints more limber now? Great! But, by the way, how long does that last? Do you need to continue treatment to keep the joints good? Oh oh, remember palliation.

22:35

So I hope this has been helpful. At a minimum, if you're now viewing symptoms as valuable; if you're seeing that merely suppressing symptoms is not only not good enough, it can be downright dangerous long term; and you have a feel for palliation as happens with Apoquel and most other drugs; if so, then bravo! You are a step closer to helping your animals be their best, most vital selves. The ones who turn heads and start conversations about how we can all do this. And so, change the world one vital animal at a time. Until next time, this is Dr. Will Falconer, wishing all the best to you and all those innocents in your care, who you are making wiser and wiser choices for.