

Letters to the Editor

Recommends integrated approach to diagnosis and treatment

The article on sialadenosis in dogs (*JAVMA*, Mar 15, 2000, pp 872–874) was interesting for what it didn't include as well as for what it did. Given the number of animals that hypersalivate when frightened or otherwise stressed, coupled with the rapid positive response of the dogs in this study to phenobarbital, it would seem that an equally comprehensive workup should have been done to eliminate or address any underlying behavioral and bond causes of this problem. I suggest this on the basis of the fact that both hyper- and hypomotility of the digestive and urinary tracts constitute part of the normal fear response in animals. However, whereas this display tends to be unilateral and short lived in the wild animal (ie, the gut and bladder empty rapidly to lighten the animal's weight, and the functions of these organs shut down so all energy may be channeled to skeletal muscles for a flight or fight response), this sequence may occur numerous times daily in the life of a timid pet in a complex household. It doesn't seem unreasonable to speculate that, after a certain amount of time in such an environment, such assaults could take their toll on the animal's physiology. Drugs that dull the animal's responsiveness to its surroundings might alleviate the signs, but they would do nothing to eliminate the cause(s).

Unfortunately, until such a time as we learn to take an integrated approach to the diagnosis and treatment of all medical problems that includes a comprehensive physical, behavioral, and bond history, we will remain as we are now—doomed to offer little more than symptomatic treatment to an ever-growing number of nonspecific diseases at a financial and emotional cost that may undermine the

animal's behavior and its relationship with the owner even more.

Myrna Milani, DVM
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Dr. Boydell responds:

Dr Milani's letter gives me the opportunity to emphasize that a full clinical work up, particularly where there is a suggestion of neurologic dysfunction, will include the acquisition of details of any behavioral changes or changes in circumstances, especially with regard to the relationship between owner and patient. In no case was any behavioral abnormality noted save for signs of depression, variable reluctance to exercise, and variable inappetence.

The rapid response to orally administered phenobarbitone included resolution of these signs. Although not stressed in the paper, all dogs were reported to be generally much brighter and more active so that their response to outside stimuli was enhanced rather than dulled.

The authors must agree that the treatment is unlikely to eliminate the cause of this condition, and considerable study is required before we can claim any understanding of sialadenosis in dogs (or humans).

Behavioral aberrations must be considered, particularly when one examines the human condition and a relationship with eating disorders. Conversely, however, one might argue that behavioral disease may have an underlying physico-chemical basis, and current investigations into this condition in humans and dogs are focused on

such changes in the innervation to the salivary gland.

Of greater concern to the authors is the lack of any recognized underlying disease as has been identified in many cases in people.

Pip Boydell, BVetMed
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Is the Veterinarian's Oath necessary?

I am responding to Dr. David A. Rickards' letter where he asked the question as to whether the Veterinarian's Oath is necessary (*JAVMA*, April 1, 2000, p 1060). He stated "I further believe that all the swearing and oaths in the world will not make them (veterinarians) more ethical or more sincere. My ideas are not original. As I recall, the man in the Sermon on the Mount said, 'Swear not at all.'"

Since Dr. Rickards quoted the statement "swear not at all," excerpted from the Sermon on the Mount apparently to support the idea that oaths are of little value in promoting ethical behavior, it is reasonable to ask whether it was the intent of this sermon to abolish all oaths and vows. Please consider this statement about sworn oaths in the context of the ethical principle being taught. The context of the portion of the Sermon on the Mount that states, "But, I tell you, do not swear at all..." does not indicate that the intention was to abolish all oaths. Rather, it refers to a hypocritical deterioration and perversion of oath taking. At that time, frequent taking of oaths in attempt to lend credibility to one's

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statements became popular because of the prevalence of lying and deceit.

After discouraging indiscriminate oath-taking, the sermon further states: "Simply let your word 'Yes' mean 'Yes,' your 'No,' 'No.'" In everyday life, a simple yes or no should be altogether trustworthy and not in need of additional bolstering by sworn statements. A person should not have two standards but should sincerely mean what he or she says. However, making a choice to take an oath when necessary to assure others of the seriousness of his or her intentions or of the truthfulness of what he or she says was not discouraged.

Returning to Dr. Rickards' question about whether or not the Veterinarians' Oath is necessary, he raises a valid point. However, I cannot answer this question in the context of whether the oath is necessary for him. I can only answer this question as it applies to me. I first made the choice to pledge to abide by the Veterinarian's Oath in 1964 when I received the DVM degree from Purdue University. To me, making a sworn statement to uphold this code of ethical conduct was, and still is, of great importance. Since then, I have found that taking time to reflect on the meaning of my promise with the personal goal of putting the ethical principles contained in the Veterinarian's Oath into everyday practice continues to have a posi-

tive influence on me and thus benefits those whom I serve.¹

*Carl A. Osborne, DVM, PhD
St. Paul, Minn*

1. Osborne CA, The veterinarian's oath: are you keeping your promise? *JAVMA* 1991;198:1906-1908.

Dr. Rickards responds:

Dr. Carl Osborne is undoubtedly an authority on many things, including oaths and swearing. However, I disagree with his conclusions in this instance. It is still my belief that all official oaths are unnecessary.

The biblical injunction in the Sermon on the Mount does not say swear sometimes, or rarely, or as Dr. Osborne suggested, "when necessary to assure others...of your truthfulness." The text simply states, "Swear not at all."

Certainly we should all be free to swear an oath if we feel so moved, but let us not coerce others into doing so. From ancient Rome to Nazi Germany, authority figures have coerced people into taking oaths. In many cases swearing an oath provided a pseudo-morality and self-righteousness to take the place of natural honesty and dignity.

I grant you that swearing is still commonplace today. Maybe it serves a purpose? I find it hard to tell where sanctity ends and sanctimony begins.

*David A. Rickards, DVM
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