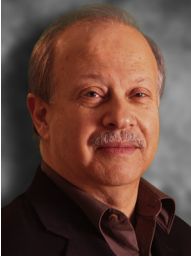


Preface

Behavior: A Guide for Practitioners



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Editors

There have been several issues of *Veterinary Clinics of North America: Small Animal Practice* dedicated to the subject of companion animal behavior. Since the last issue, the College of Veterinary Behaviorists (dacvb.org) has grown steadily, considerable research has been published in the field, and attendance at continuing education meetings pertaining to behavior continues to be “standing room only.”

Many veterinary schools still do not teach behavioral medicine, and many veterinarians have the misconception that dealing with their clients’ behavior complaints is too time-consuming. Yet attention to a pet’s behavior should be an integral part of every veterinary curriculum and a focus of every veterinary visit. As the reader will see, behavior problems are not simply a result of a doting, permissive owner but rather a complex result of genetics, early developmental experiences and learning, and the effects of stress and physical health. Veterinarians must have a sound understanding of normal species behavior, learning principles, and how to manage and modify undesirable behavior. Behavior screening must be an essential element of every veterinary visit since a change in behavior might be the first or only sign of underlying medical problem, or a mental health disorder. In addition, the complex role that stress plays in the development of many health and behavioral issues is only just now beginning to be recognized. In this issue, we have invited a diverse group of veterinary behaviorists, behavioral technicians, and behavior residents to provide a guide for practitioners to better understand the interplay of genetics, stress, and health in the development of behavior problems and how some of the most common canine and feline behavior problems can be managed.

The first article in this issue helps the clinician understand how adding behavioral counseling to a practice can be a sound financial decision as well as one that saves lives. The authors provide guidelines on behavioral triage, including how practitioners can incorporate a full range of behavioral services into the veterinary practice,

integrating staff into a team approach to behavior counseling, and guidelines for referring problem behaviors. The following article presents the science behind learning in a simple and straightforward manner, providing the practitioner with the information needed to help their clients effectively modify their pet's behavior, tools for safe and effective management, and case examples of common problems. The next article explains why and how to implement environmental enrichment for pets in the home and in the kennel. While enrichment is a mandated component of laboratory animals and others kept in captivity, enriching the lives of our pets is all too often overlooked. By considering what is biologically relevant for dogs and cats living in our homes, this article provides guidance for offering behavioral choices and encouraging the species-typical behaviors that are critical to our pets' mental well-being.

"Pet-Friendly Veterinary Practice" explains why and how attention to the experience that animals have while in our practices can drastically reduce the number of clients who avoid bringing their pets to the veterinary clinic, reduce the fear and stress associated with veterinary visits for the pet and owner, and help to insure safe and positive experiences for all. This article provides a detailed guide for practitioners for the prevention and management of fear of the veterinary clinic.

The genetics behind behavior has long been a mystery but in this rapidly advancing field of medical science and technology, the veil is slowly being lifted in our understanding of how genotype contributes to behavior. While the subject is complex, no single gene directs a particular behavior; epigenetics, gene-gene interactions, and gene-environment interactions are all at play. Next article reviews the current state research and provides a basic primer for answering our clients' questions about the heritability of canine behavioral traits.

The contribution of medical conditions to problem behaviors can be easily overlooked, especially if finances limit the level of diagnostics available to a pet owner. When no obvious medical condition is found, the practitioner might all too quickly consider the problem "behavioral." Next article takes a systematic approach to how different medical conditions might contribute to behavioral signs, and how they are complexly intertwined.

Because of the integral role it plays in mental, physical, and social health, and how it impacts on human-pet relationships, the editors felt that an entire article on the role of stress was pertinent for this issue. Next article reviews the importance of being observant to the visual cues of stress that animals demonstrate, as well as the role that stress may play in the development of specific medical conditions. In addition, this article provides guidelines for stress auditing, stress management, and stress prevention.

The next four articles address some of the most common and serious behavior problems referred to veterinary behaviorists. Abnormal repetitive behaviors are behaviors that are also likely to have their basis in stress. In other cases, they are due to underlying and overlooked medical conditions causing pain, discomfort, or altered sensations. In the last 20 years much research on these types of behaviors in humans, laboratory animals, and captive wild animals has contributed to improved understanding. Rather than a single disorder, this article reviews what is likely to be a heterogeneous group of behaviors that have serious implications in pet health and welfare. This is followed by three articles on aggression: canine aggression to people, feline intraspecific aggression, and feline aggression to people. The articles provide extensive guidance for practitioners for understanding canine and feline communication and signaling, diagnosis, prevention, risk assessment and prognosis, management, and treatment.

The final article is included as an “appendix summary” of drug doses used in veterinary behavior, many of which are mentioned throughout the text. However, the reader is warned to fully explore the indications, contraindications, and potential side effects; screen for any underlying medical problems; weigh the evidence, benefits, and risks; and insure informed consent before dispensing any medication.

As editors, we wish to thank each of the authors for the time, effort, and commitment in advancing the field of veterinary clinical behavior. In continuing education, in research and in their extensive body of publications. In fact, we congratulate our colleagues in veterinary behavior on a great new resource co-authored entirely by American College of Veterinary Behaviour diplomates, entitled *Decoding your Dog*, from Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. As described by the title, in this book they decipher the latest studies, explain common dog behaviors and describe how to prevent or change unwanted behaviors. We hope that the articles in this issue provide, as the title suggests, a useful and practical Guide for Practitioners to advance their knowledge and improve their skills in the growing field of veterinary behavioral medicine.

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