This issue of *Veterinary Clinics of North America: Small Animal Practice* is the first since May 2014 to focus on behavior problems in cats and dogs. It provides the most current and useful information on both diagnosing and treating common problem behaviors in veterinary patients. As such, it fills a need for both veterinary students and seasoned veterinarians looking for tools to make treating behavior problems a more realistic and manageable endeavor.

The first article, “Diagnosing Behavior Problems: A Guide for Practitioners,” focuses on the nuts and bolts of diagnosing problems accurately so that treatment plans are effective. There are aspects of behavior diagnostics that differ substantially from the diagnostic strategies undertaken in medicine cases. For instance, videos of behaviors streamline the process because the clinician can assess the behavior firsthand rather than through the interpretation of the client. The article presents diagnostic criteria for common canine and feline problem behaviors, the ones most likely to be treated by the general practitioner. A section on assessing the prognosis of a behavior case provides useful gauges of the severity of a problem.

Two major dog-specific behavior problems are tackled in “Separation, Confinement, or Noises: What Is Scaring that Dog?” and “Managing Canine Aggression in the Home.” In treating canine anxieties, it is crucial to have the correct diagnosis, as treatment plans differ significantly among separation anxiety, confinement anxiety, and noise aversions. This article provides excellent diagnostic criteria and sound treatment options for all three. And, dogs are more likely to present for aggressive behavior, compared to any other behavior problem. The first step in treatment is to manage the dog so that no one is injured and the dog has a break from practicing the undesirable behaviors. Once management strategies are firmly in place, other treatment options, like desensitization and counterconditioning or medication, may be initiated.

The main behavior problem of the cat, inappropriate urination, is discussed in “Vertical or Horizontal: Diagnosing and Treating Cats Who Urinate Outside the Box.” As in
other behavior issues, an accurate diagnosis of either urine marking or toileting is crucial to the effectiveness of any treatment plan. This article provides the important diagnostic criteria and treatment options for each of the two problems. Accurate diagnosis and effective treatment of these problems save many cats from relinquishment and euthanasia.

There is perhaps no behavior treatment so seemingly complicated, but actually so straightforward, as desensitization and counterconditioning. The “rules” of keeping the pet under threshold and increasing the strength of the stimulus only gradually are the main predictors of treatment success or failure. Giving the client an accurate description of the goals and principles of, as well as specific strategies for implementing, this behavior modification tool is essential for success. “Desensitization and Counterconditioning: When and How” provides the clinician just that.

Owners of aging pets face many challenges. Older age brings with it the higher likelihood of a pet developing a serious, and potentially life-threatening, medical condition. It also brings the increased pain and the possibility of behavior changes the owners might refer to as “senility.” The clinician treating an older pet is more likely to wonder if the behavior changes noted are due to medical problems, primary behavior problems, or a combination. Charting the course of the behavior changes in the older pet can be daunting. “Special Considerations for Diagnosing Behavior Problems in Older Pets” offers concrete guidelines.

The last two articles, “Advances in Behavioral Psychopharmacology” and “Behavioral Nutraceuticals and Diets,” explore the possibility of altering brain function as a means to resolving, or perhaps preventing, problem behaviors. A few human medications have recently gained popularity in the treatment of problem behaviors and have been the focus of new research. And several new diets and alternative supplements are now available for everything from anxiety to cognitive dysfunction.

Together, these articles guide the practitioner through a start-to-finish plan for diagnosing and treating common problem behaviors in small animals. I hope they serve their audience well and expand the readers’ knowledge of behavioral medicine.

I would like to thank each of the authors for devoting their time to researching and writing about these topics. These authors are among the rising stars of veterinary behavior, each one having completed his or her training and board certification within the past three years. Their future research will, undoubtedly, answer some of the outstanding questions that remain about why pets develop problem behaviors and how best for us to solve them.

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