Clinicians play an important role in diagnosing problem behaviors as a precursor to treating them. This requires a protocol for gathering historical behavioral and health information, direct observation and examination of the animal, and a broad knowledge base of medical and behavioral differential diagnoses for those findings. Aggression and anxiety are the most commonly reported behavior problems in dogs. In cats, elimination problems and aggression are the most prevalent. Other important diagnoses for these species are cognitive dysfunction and abnormal repetitive behaviors.

When presented with a behavioral complaint, veterinarians must identify all contributing medical or behavioral disorders. Veterinarians can give valuable information regarding management and training tools. Owners should be directed to trainers or staff who are familiar with positive, reward-based training techniques. Psychotropic medication is prescribed to animals with a behavioral disorder (abnormal behavior) showing signs of anxiety and/or increased reactivity. Veterinarians need to collect a thorough behavioral history, understand the rationale behind the use of a drug class, and discuss expectations with pet owners.

Separation anxiety and noise aversions are 2 of the most common welfare issues affecting pet dogs. Despite the high prevalence of these conditions, many affected dogs do not receive treatment. Separation anxiety, noise aversions, and confinement distress may be comorbid with each other and with other behavioral issues. A behavioral history and video can help confirm the diagnosis. Treatment with psychopharmaceuticals and behavior modification is recommended to improve the affected dog’s welfare.

Canine aggression occurring in the home can be a dangerous diagnosis with costly consequences to all members of the household. Management is a key modality in the treatment of canine aggression in the home. A
thorough history will detail each trigger, target, and context and allow for the veterinary team to put together a comprehensive management plan. Management allows for the avoidance of future aggressive episodes and minimizes the risks associated with living with a patient with these diagnoses. Although risk cannot be mitigated 100%, thorough management can create a safe environment for the implementation of the behavior treatment plan.

**Vertical or Horizontal? Diagnosing and Treating Cats Who Urinate Outside the Box**

Leticia Mattos de Souza Dantas

Feline elimination problems are commonly presented to general practitioners and behavioral medicine specialists. The correct diagnosis is often missed by veterinarians owing to individual variation and multifactorial cases. Three diagnostic umbrellas need to be considered: medical problems, toileting behavior outside of the litter box, and urine marking. The treatment plan for most cases, regardless of etiology, involves optimum litter box management, fulfilling cats’ environmental needs, stress reduction, behavior therapy techniques, and trigger removal. Medical management with psychoactive medication might be necessary in cases in which chronic stress, fear, and anxiety play a role in the feline patient’s symptomatology.

**Helping Pet Owners Change Pet Behaviors: An Overview of the Science**

Beth Groetzinger Strickler

The predominant approach to training dogs and modifying their behavior has been steeped in antiquated theories of dominance and pack leadership that are not based in scientific evidence. Animals learn best through associative and consequential interactions. Using the most current evidence-based techniques, while acknowledging that each pet is an individual, results in more effective behavior modification.

**Desensitization and Counterconditioning: When and How?**

Sabrina Poggiagliolmi

Desensitization and counterconditioning are behavioral techniques widely used in veterinary behavioral medicine to treat anxieties, fears, and phobias. With desensitization, the patient is taught to relax as it is exposed to anxiety-provoked stimuli in a gradual fashion. The controlled exposures start with the patient relaxing in the presence of a muted stimulus (ie, a stimulus that does not trigger a fearful response). Over time, the patient will be introduced gradually to a more intense stimulus with the hope that eventually it will remain relaxed at all levels of exposure.

**Special Considerations for Diagnosing Behavior Problems in Older Pets**

Eranda Rajapaksha

Aging is a complex process that involves changes in sensory perception, cognition, and physical strength. Physiologic, metabolic, and emotional changes of the aging process can lead to behavioral problems in older
pets. Treatment of behavior problems in older pets requires a multimodal therapeutic approach. Frequent follow-up visits are required to monitor pets and comment on prognosis. Clients should be informed of the prognosis and should be educated to evaluate pain, discomfort, and general quality of life of the aging pet.

Advances in Behavioral Psychopharmacology

Leslie Sinn

Recent studies have led to some groundbreaking findings regarding the use of medications for the support of behavioral health in dogs and cats. Despite tantalizing results, these studies should be viewed in light of their limitations. Consequently, the results of these studies should be applied in the clinical setting with caution and with a full understanding of the potential pros and cons of using these medications. A review of the research available on trazodone, clonidine, detomidine, dexmedetomidine, propranolol, pindolol, maropitant, memantine, venlafaxine, and gabapentin discusses these pros and cons and highlights key points regarding their clinical use and application.

Behavioral Nutraceuticals and Diets

Jillian M. Orlando

Behavioral problems of companion animals are becoming more widely recognized. As a result, there are a growing number of behavioral nutraceuticals and diets on the market. These products may be useful for the treatment of mild conditions, for clients who are hesitant to give their pet a psychopharmacologic agent, or sometimes in conjunction with psychopharmacologic agents. Veterinarians should critically review the research associated with nutraceuticals and diets, and have an understanding of the functional ingredients and their mechanisms of action before prescribing treatment. This article provides an overview of nutraceuticals, their mechanisms of action, and relevant research regarding their use.