

APBC summer veterinary newsletter

Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors

Promoting the Best in Pet Behaviour



Welcome to the Summer Vet Newsletter

A warm welcome to our summer newsletter and especially to our new subscribers. The APBC has had a busy few months organising our exciting upcoming CPD events for 2013 and details of these can be found on our website at www.apbc.org.uk/events. Our webinars proved very popular last year so in addition to our usual Vet CPD seminars, we also now have a full programme of webinar events, kindly sponsored by Merial. The programmes for the Feline Conference on 20th October 2013 and the Annual Conference on 15th March 2014 will soon be published. We also have great pleasure in announcing 'Are you thinking what I'm thinking?' seminars by Patricia McConnell in November 2013. Referral and medication guidelines to help make the relationship between APBC members and referring vets run as smoothly as possible are now available on the website at www.apbc.org.uk/help/vet. These were written by myself with many thanks to Daniel Mills, Francesca Riccomini and Jon Bowen for their invaluable advice and input. We are also very excited by the enormous success of our feline and canine handling posters which we launched at BSAVA Congress this year. These are designed to assist low stress handling of animals at the veterinary surgery and were written by myself, Stephanie Hedges and Trudi Atkinson. If you wish to purchase copies of these they are available on the APBC website www.apbc.org.uk/shop/general



Which would you prefer for a medical diagnosis,



To see or not to see?

examination of a patient or a chat on the phone?

The above picture shows one moment in time of the vital body language that can be observed during a home visit. Clare Wilson.

Remote consultations

by Rosie Barclay MPhil CCAB, Chair of the APBC.

There has recently been a spate of flyers and letters from various companies offering “behavioural” advice via remote consultations. For a one off payment it seems you can contact a ‘behavioural expert’ on the telephone or via the Internet and all your behavioural troubles will be solved. It seems to me a ludicrous and dangerous notion that anyone can diagnose a behavioural disorder without actually seeing the dog no matter how experienced they purport to be.

The APBC does not endorse such practice but we do understand that there is a place for remote behavioural first aid whether over the phone, on TV or radio shows or magazine question and answer pages as these can direct worried owners to find appropriate help. However, when it comes to diagnosing "behavioural disorders" then this is a very different matter.

It has been recently shown that the human perception of emotion in dogs, particularly fear based behaviour, is dependent on how experienced the human is regarding their knowledge of dog behaviour (Wan et al 2012). If the owner misinterprets his or her own dog’s emotions this will obviously have an effect on how the remote counsellor views the problem.

Remote consultations may also contravene the codes of conduct within many

by David Ryan PG dip (CABC) CCAB, Member of the APBC www.dog-secrets.co.uk

“To see or not to see?” – that was the question that sparked a debate amongst APBC members earlier this month. Or more accurately, “Is it possible, or desirable, to counsel an owner on the behaviour of their pet remotely, by telephone, email or fax?” The march of technology provides us with a wealth of methods of communication that we should consider. It is commonplace for clients to send video recordings of their pets’ unusual behaviour, often captured on their mobile phone, to give the behaviourist a heads-up on the consultation these days, and we could quite literally see them across the world by Skype if we needed to. Certainly, not travelling to see the client and pet could save money, and we could fit a lot more into a day, but how far should we go when trying to keep costs down when it might compromise the quality of the advice we provide?

The debate, which I think needed to be had, was sparked by a couple of pieces of research⁽¹⁾⁽²⁾ from Tufts University near Boston in the USA that have been doing the rounds. Both were headed by respected behaviourist Dr Nicholas Dodman and they deduce that the PetFax remote consulting service offered by Dr Dodman at Tufts is as effective as seeing the pet and counselling the owner in a clinic. For the PetFax service, clients send in a completed extensive questionnaire of their pets’ behaviour and receive “*a written report containing a possible explanation of your pet's motivation for problem behavior and personalized suggestions for correcting the*

professional companion animal organisations especially where they stipulate the importance of high professional standards, excellent welfare procedures and the maintenance of health and safety. For instance would a remote consultation be able to provide the high standards offered by these organisations? Without closely observing the dog interacting within its environment and all the subtle nuances of body language how are we able to accurately diagnose the problem and maintain good welfare practice? How well will the owner be able to understand what is being conveyed and carry out instruction without being shown and how effective will owner compliance be? How are we able to maintain safety issues if we cannot see what and who needs to be kept safe? And finally if the advice given results in harm does the fact the advisor didn't actually see the animal have any legal consequence?

Therefore, the APBC feel strongly that telephone consults are not best practice, may contravene our code of practice and may lead to complicated legal issues in certain circumstances. We pride ourselves on promoting the best in pet behaviour and will continue to do so by observing the animal concerned directly.

problem"⁽³⁾ with access to communication with a behaviourist for three months.

In a clinic obviously the behaviourist gets to meet the client and the pet before making a behavioural diagnosis and providing a programme to change the problem behaviour, but the same pre-meeting questionnaire was completed and the same broad advice was given in both cases. It sounds astounding – a description of the pet's behaviour provided by the owner is sufficient for the behaviourist to provide a remedy? Perhaps we need never leave home again! However, a closer look at the two papers reveals it may not be as cut and dried as it seems.

The first paper was a retrospective analysis of cases of dogs that were showing aggression towards their owners - 42 cases were taken from the PetFax and 42 from the clinic. It should be pointed out that these numbers are very small from which to be projecting statistical relevance, where one dog makes up more than 2% of the group. 82% (69) of the 84 dogs responded positively to the programme, but although it is reported that the mean aggression scores did not vary between groups before and after, five dogs from the clinic group did not show any improvement at all, as opposed to ten dogs from the PetFax group.

Perhaps this is a case where the actual numbers speak louder than the percentage averages. As a behaviour counsellor I would be very concerned if a quarter of my clients did not show any improvement at all (actually I'd also be concerned if an eighth of my clients reported no change at all in their dog's



Robots in the Round Pen

by Debbie Busby BSc (hons) MBPsS, provisional member of the APBC, photo reproduced with kind thanks to Robert Brown.

In this article I discuss the “new age” of horse training methodology as expounded by Monty Roberts, some of its ethological, behavioural, and physiological correlates and a recent study which reported the effects of replacing a human handler with a non-human stimulus (a small radio-controlled car). The car was found to have the same aversive effect as the human handler, thus casting doubt on the explanation that the efficacy of Join Up lies in the handler’s use of equine body language. The car was replaced three times due to aggressive damage by horses. A different study found Join Up to be more effective than conventional UK horse training; however both methods are based on the use of, primarily, negative reinforcement to elicit required behaviour.

The horse training technique known as Join Up is marketed by American horseman Monty Roberts. He claims to use “the language of Equus” as a humane way to induce co-operation in unschooled or

aggression following my programme!)

The second paper looked at dogs referred for “separation anxiety” by their owners. Only 69 of 201 post-consult surveys were returned, 28 from the PetFax and from the 41 clinic group. Again we should be very wary when dealing with small numbers and it is interesting that the poor rate of return left significantly less from the PetFax group than the clinic. Again the paper reports no significant difference in the two groups, with both showing a decrease in separation anxiety score of 40%, but the numbers show that four dogs in the PetFax group actually got worse, as opposed to all responding clients’ dogs in the clinic group showing improvement. 92% of the clinic dogs showed some degree of improvement as opposed to 78% of PetFax dogs. When we are dealing with real people and real dogs, it is sometimes worth looking at the clients and not just the statistics – that 22% were dogs and owners not helped at all by PetFax.

It is interesting to speculate that had client satisfaction been higher, more would have responded in this study, and in the aggression study it is also interesting to speculate that perhaps it is the more difficult dogs that didn’t respond to improvement (the pre-aggression scores for the un-improved dogs aren’t given). To be fair, the papers point out that observation of the behaviour and in-person interviews with the client are more desirable than remote consultations, and there are many provisos tucked away in the body of the papers, but quite often it’s only the strap-line that busy people read.

recalcitrant horses. His method involves sending the horse away to the outside track of a round pen (an enclosure of around 15-20m diameter with strong wire or wooden walls around 4m high) by waving a gathered up lunge line exaggeratedly so that the horse runs away from the handler and continues trotting/cantering round the outside track of the round pen until the handler considers it is ready to “join up”, at which point the handler stops chasing the horse and “invites” the horse to join them in the centre of the pen. The handler tests that join up has occurred by walking away from the horse; if the horse follows, join up is thought to have taken place and, according to Roberts, the horse is ready to be asked to do whatever it did not want to do before (e.g. load into a horse box.) The technique has been adopted by the Intelligent Horsemanship movement and it is also used by many lay people. It can be compared with the conventional technique of lunging.

Join Up is said to rely on a human's ability to mimic another horse through the handler's body language; however a study by Warren-Smith and McGreevy (2008) did not support this view. In Join Up, when the handler observes signs which they interpret as the horse's willingness to co-operate, for example a lowered head, licking and chewing, or turning to face the handler, the aversive stimulus is removed. After a number of repetitions the horse learns that it can avoid being chased around the pen if it turns to face the handler and approaches him/her. This is the “join up”. Orienting towards a fear-inducing object is a recognized behaviour on the equid ethogram (McDonnell, 2003), and licking and chewing are recognized indicators of anxiety in horses (McDonnell, 2005). Other observed indicators of anxiety include tight mouth and

But what should the take-home message be? Well, both of the Tufts papers used a formula approach to behaviour modification – the clients were given the same advice whether they attended the clinic or not - and in both cases a small percentage of the dogs were much improved. Perhaps this is not about remote consultations, but more about when using a formulaic approach might be successful. Undoubtedly there are basic principles that almost every behaviour modification programme will include, and simply handing over that information by whatever means may be sufficient to improve many dogs to some degree and a few dogs to a higher degree. Most notably, the Tufts research didn't include the acknowledged gold standard of behaviour counselling, the home-visit. In a clinic and by fax there is often not only no opportunity to observe the problem behaviour (which isn't essential or even desirable sometimes) but crucially, because the clinical setting can change the dog's behaviour, there is often no opportunity to observe the dogs' *normal* behaviour.

The home visit allows the behaviour counsellor to observe at first hand the environment in which the dog and the client coexist on a daily basis – their normal behaviour independently and towards each other. It is amazing what insights into the dog's (and the client's) behaviour are revealed in their home. Often clients too can open up more in their own home. Remote counselling has its place in a proportion of problem pet behaviour cases, but it in most cases it cannot be as effective as face to face counselling in the client's own home. It is not inappropriate to counsel clients

muzzle, narrow, elongated nostrils and a triangulated eye as described in Rees (1985).

Behaviourists have analysed the practice in terms of learning theory and identify negative reinforcement as the cause of avoidance behaviour induced in the horse via the presentation of an aversive stimulus (trainer waving frightening lunge rope). It is suggested that the flight response is *not* reinforced because the horse's ability to flee is restricted by the presence of the round pen; consequently the flight motivation gradually diminishes as the response habituates (Mills, 2010). However the technique as generally practised is unlikely to result in effective habituation, and the welfare issue of flooding/learned helplessness arises (Hall *et al.*, 2008). In terms of neurophysiology, stress-induced endorphin release mediates the learned helplessness response. Riley *et al.* (1980) suggest an interaction between endorphins and ACTH, and Hemingway and Reigle (1987) identified endogenous opiate systems in the induction and expression of learned helplessness. The involvement of endogenous opiate systems in learned helplessness and stress-induced analgesia is also indicated (Cabib, 2006, cited in Hall *et al.*). Hall *et al.* (2008) report, "When behavioral responses fail to result in escape from the stressor, profound inhibition of dopamine release in the nucleus accumbens occurs, the consequence is helplessness or behavioral despair."

Henshall *et al.* (2012) investigated the perception that the handler's body language is an essential element of the process. They turned to an examination of escape-avoidance strategies previously studied in dogs and rats, which found that animals choose to avoid aversive stimuli altogether

remotely by telephone or other means in all cases, nor is it inappropriate to see clients in a clinic. In some cases it may be the best compromise of cost and distance. In other cases, particularly where there may be safety and legal repercussions from aggressive behaviour, it may be less appropriate.

In behaviour counselling there is no one-size-fits-all solution. The experienced and qualified behaviourist will assess each case and tailor their approach for the individual. A formulaic approach remotely or in a clinic may be what is required in a particular case, or it may not, but only by a careful examination of each case can the skilled behaviourist devise the most suitable programme to maximise the opportunity to change the problem behaviour.

References

- (1) Cottam, N., Dodman, N.H., Moon-Fanelli, A.A., Patronek G. J.,(2008) Comparison of Remote Versus In-Person Behavioral Consultation for Treatment of Canine Separation Anxiety, *Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science*, 11:1, 28-41
- (2) Dodman, N. H., Smith, A, and Holmes, D., (2005) Comparison of the efficacy of remote consultations and personal consultations for the treatment of dogs which are aggressive towards their owners. *Veterinary Record* 156: 168-170
- (3) About Tufts University PetFax Service <http://www.tufts.edu/vet/petfax/about.html> accessed 16/2/13

rather than escape. In a creative and elegantly designed experiment (ISES Conference Proceedings 2012) they substituted a radio-controlled car for the trainer and manipulated independent variables in which the car chased the horse, or did not chase the horse. A warning signal (an electronic tone) sounded for ten seconds, and continued as the car began to chase the horses around the pen, eliciting a flight response. If the horse stopped and turned to face the car (this behaviour being defined as "avoidance" behaviour rather than "flight"), the car and the warning signal stopped, and a different noise (a "safety signal") sounded. If the horse moved away again, the car and warning signal recommenced. 11 horses were used, and each session lasted for a maximum of 90 seconds. Nine of the horses learned to respond with avoidance behaviour (turn and face the car) within four sessions, and three of these approached the car during the "safety signal" period. The researchers observed that horses who approached the car also presented aggressive behaviours including kicking out and stamping on the car, and a total of four cars were used during the experiment because of damage by the subject horses. Consider the safety risks of how this aggressive response might be directed towards a human handler. The successful modification of the round pen technique to elicit escape and avoidance responses to a non-human stimulus led researchers to conclude that behaviour was the result of pressure and release (negative reinforcement). Horses initially chose to escape from the aversive stimulus, but they quickly learned to adopt an avoidance strategy, stopping the entire aversive process by staying close to the stimulus. In the original round pen process this would be the "join up" in which the horse learns to



References for Debbie's equine article

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Rees, L. (1985). *The Horse's Mind*. Prentice

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stay close to the trainer.

Consequently Henshall *et al.* refuted the claim that the trainer is replicating horse to horse communication, and warned that because elements of round pen training are aversive to horses their use should be undertaken with caution. Contrary to the claim that Join Up is humane because the horse can choose whether or not to approach the trainer, these results indicate that the success of the method lies in a forced choice between fear and safety, since the horse must choose between being repeatedly frightened or remaining with the trainer. We should ask whether it is humane or ethical to rely on the intentional production and termination of a fear response to train horses to comply with subjective human aspirations.

Roberts disputed the findings of the above experiment and participated in a different study which compared his method for starting young horses with that of a conventional UK technique (Fowler *et al.*, 2012). 14 untrained horses were matched for temperament and randomly assigned to Roberts' group (MRT) or the conventional training group (CT). After initial training to accept saddle and rider, horses performed set tasks and were scored by judges who did not know who the trainers were. Researchers claim that lower maximum heart rates and higher performance scores in the MRT group demonstrate the greater effectiveness of the Monty Roberts method; however heart rate as a measure of emotional state is contested since low heart rate in response to an aversive stimulus has been recorded in restrained mammals (Jelen and Zagrodzka, 2001), and heart rate variability should also be a relevant welfare measure (von Borell *et al.*, 2007, cited in

Hall Press.

Riley, A., Zellner, D., & Duncan, H. (1980). The role of endorphins in animal learning and behavior. *Neuroscience and Biobehavioral Reviews*, 4(1), 69-76.

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Hall *et al.*). Additionally, in evaluating task performance, whilst both techniques utilised negative reinforcement, there was such variation in equipment and trainer skill levels that meaningful comparison of the methods is subject to question.

It would appear, therefore, that, contrary to the claims made by round pen trainers, the effect of Join Up cannot be attributed to a mysterious language of Equus; rather the round pen technique should be understood and discussed in the evidence-based context of learning theory, with due regard given to the issues of equine welfare and human safety identified in this discussion.

Upcoming Vet Webinars

9th July 8pm. 'FLUTD, The importance of behavioural therapy as part of the treatment programme, by Francesca Riccomini

9th August 8pm. 'Neutering Myths', by Caroline Warnes

9th September 8pm. 'Cognitive decline in dogs', by Caroline Warnes

APBC Membership Levels

Please find information about our different membership levels at the following link www.apbc.org.uk/apbc/membership_levels. Please note that only FULL members have been assessed by our application committee.



A taster of our handling posters.

Those of you who met us at BSAVA congress hopefully already have these on your surgery walls and it would be great to have feedback about how they are helping with your patients. For those who don't yet have the posters you can order them online here www.apbc.orh.uk/shop/general.



In the next issue....

Rabbit behaviour - behavioural needs of rabbits and a case study illustrating appropriate enrichment for these delightful pets.

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