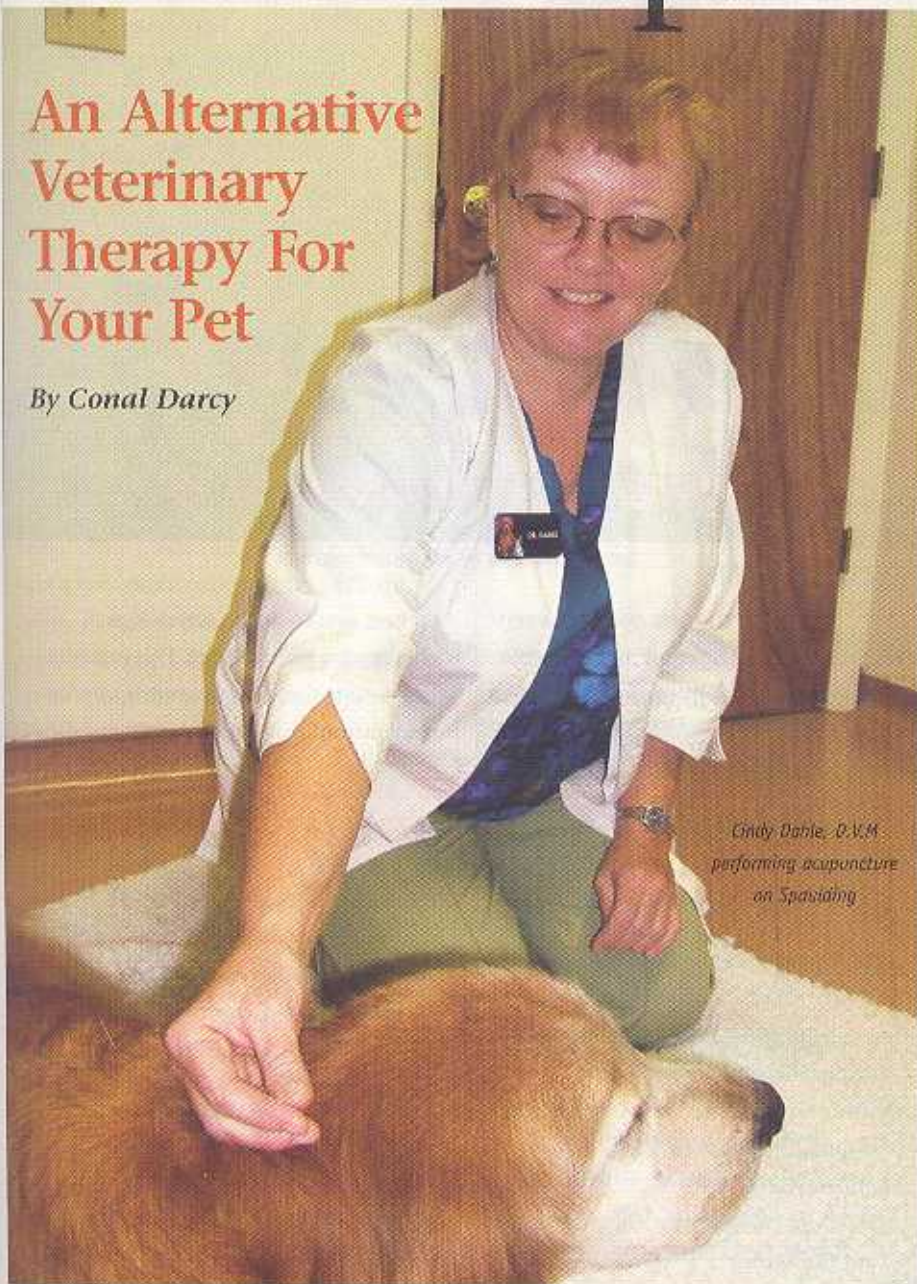


Pet Acupuncture

An Alternative Veterinary Therapy For Your Pet

By Conal Darcy



Cindy Dahle, D.V.M., performing acupuncture on Spalding

nels of this energy.

More commonly performed on humans, acupuncture for pets is gaining a foothold among veterinarians as its beneficial effects become more apparent. Studies of acupuncture in humans have shown that it can stimulate nerves, increase blood circulation, relieve muscle spasms, and cause the emission of endorphins—the body's natural pain blockers. It is widely believed that the same effects can be achieved in animals.

Dr. Dahle became a vet in 1993 after studying veterinary medicine at the University of Pennsylvania. There she became interested in acupuncture and studied to receive her certification from the International Veterinary Acupuncture Society (IVAS), a body that offers theoretical and practical training in this ancient method.

Her experience shows as Dr. Dahle begins the procedure. After a quick check of a spot with her thumb, she deftly twists the first of ten to fifteen needles into the dog's back, beginning at the base of the head. Within 2 minutes, every needle is in place, each one reaching to approximately 1 inch under the skin. "There are probably some 800 points on the body, [of] which any acupuncturist has a favourite hundred," says Dr. Dahle. Spalding remains still throughout the entire procedure, without the slightest hint of pain or discomfort.

Spalding is an old hand at this. In his heyday he was a star at the sport of dog agility, where competing animals are judged on their ability to work with their owners and make their way through an obstacle course. Throughout his life, however, he has suffered from disc disease in his back and pain in his shoulders and front legs. He received his first acupuncture treatment in 1999. According to Mrs. Stutterheim, it reduced his pain and

The small square room is empty aside from a bare counter, a park bench, and a fleece blanket on the ground—hardly the typical veterinary examination room. In the middle crouches Pam Stutterheim, holding up her 12-year-old golden retriever, Spalding, who is intent on sitting down. Over them stands Cindy Dahle, D.V.M., a 2-inch-long needle no thicker than a guitar string between her finger and thumb.

Nearly every 2 weeks for 6 years

Spalding has come into Dr. Dahle's office for acupuncture treatment. For those not familiar with ancient Chinese medicine, it is the insertion of special needles into the body to treat a wide variety of ailments from musculoskeletal pain to skin diseases. The theory maintains that pain and illness are caused by the blockage or accumulation of the body's energy, or Qi. To restore the natural flow of Qi, acupuncture needles are inserted along specific points on the body's meridians, the chan-

improved his physical well-being.

Eighteen months ago Spalding was diagnosed with stomach cancer. His acupuncture treatment is now being used as a complement to chemotherapy. "Most importantly for him, we're boosting his immune system. This elbow point I just put in, and this point, are both specifically for that," explains Dr. Dahle, pointing to the last two needles. He was given only 3 months to live when diagnosed; the acupuncture treatment seems to be paying off for this dog.

As any pet owner would testify, vet care can be expensive, and acupuncture is no exception. A typical diagnostic session bills at approximately \$70, with follow-up sessions costing around \$40. Depending on the illness, multiple ongoing sessions may be required. For example, chronic arthritis, the problem most commonly treated with acupuncture, requires visits every few weeks as needed for pain. Less persistent problems can usually be resolved with only one or two sessions.



Spalding receiving an acupuncture treatment

Soon after the first needle is inserted, Spalding is lying comfortably on the floor and looking a little drowsy. This is a common side effect, according to IVAS lit-

erature, and indicates physiological changes are taking effect. This organization asserts that acupuncture is safe for most any animal, and the only real dan-

More Information on Pet Acupuncture

Common Treatable Conditions*

Acupuncture is most effective on functional problems such as noninfectious inflammation, pain, and paralysis. Musculoskeletal problems such as arthritis, respiratory problems such as asthma, gastrointestinal distress, and some reproductive problems can be helped by acupuncture.

Eligible Animals

All animals are able to receive acupuncture, though most professionals focus only on specific animals such as cats and dogs or horses and livestock. If you have an uncommon pet you may need to search for an appropriately trained veterinarian (see web resources below).

Local Practitioners**

The following doctors practice acupuncture near the Annapolis area:

Teresa Fulp, DVM, South Arundel Vet. Hospital, Edgewater, MD

Cynthia Dahle, DVM, Bay Area Veterinary Hospital, Stevensville, MD

Maureen Walsh, RN
Traditional Acupuncture Associates,
Crofton, MD

Alison Key, DVM, Highway Veterinary Hospital, Bowie, MD

James Heilbron, DVM, Academy Animal Hospital, Baltimore, MD

Further Reading

These books offer more detailed information related to animal acupuncture:

The Nature of Animal Healing: The Definitive Holistic Medicine Guide to Caring for Your Dog and Cat, by Martin Goldstein, D.V.M.

Veterinary Acupuncture, by Alan M. Klide & Shiu H. Kung

Veterinary Acupuncture: Ancient Art to Modern Medicine, by Allen M. Schoen

Web Resources

www.ivas.org—The International Veterinary Acupuncture Society (IVAS) website caters mainly to members but contains general information for prospective patients.

www.aava.org—The U.S. branch of the IVAS has a searchable database of practitioners as well as more information and answers to common questions.

www.marylandpet.com/—This independent website lists practitioners of alternative medicines by area in Maryland.

*Source: www.ivas.org

**Source: www.aava.org