

Kidney Disease - Chronic Renal Failure - CRF ALTERNATIVE VETERINARY MEDICINE CENTRE

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Chronic Renal Disease in Dogs & Homœopathic input

Introduction

Chronic renal (kidney) disease in dogs (and cats) is potentially a very serious condition. Caught early, it responds well to [homeopathy](http://www.alternativevet.org) but, later in the progression of the disease, it makes for a bleaker outlook.

Conventional approach (in brief)

In conventional science and thinking, anabolic steroids are the usual therapy, going some way towards preventing the wasting of body tissue which is so characteristic of the disease. There is also a tendency to supply proprietary 'kidney diets', as a rule of thumb. When there are extensive changes in the kidney tissue, the conventional prognosis is stated as extremely poor and short-term, despite the medical intervention.

Alternative approach

What part might [homeopathy](http://www.alternativevet.org) play in the management of this condition, should your dog develop it? What should you do about diet? Is there anything else you can do? These are the reasonable questions you may ask. I hope, in this short article, that I can go some way towards answering them.

The Disease

In brief, it is best to describe *chronic interstitial nephritis* or *chronic tubular nephritis* as degenerative or destructive diseases. They might arise as a result of infection with *Leptospira canicola* or they can be caused by chronic bad nutrition or by reflux infection from chronic urinary tract infections. It is not constructive to

be too pedantic in this short article, as to causes, since the significance and long-term implication for the dog is broadly similar in each case.

The result is progressive loss of kidney tissue and, therefore, of kidney function. It is sadly the case that one most often sees **serious** cases, as a veterinary surgeon, since signs do not show clearly until the disease has advanced sufficiently to destroy the reserves of kidney capacity. An animal is born with greater than double the amount of kidney tissue required for minimum functional capacity. The clearance of toxins and waste metabolites from the body is such an important or critical function, for the ongoing health of the animal, that this 'reserve' is very necessary. The result of this is, however, that the animal can hide symptoms of trouble for a significant time, as kidney destruction continues within reserve capacity, thus effectively preventing early intervention. It is important to realise that cases which are diagnosed, therefore, are usually quite advanced and have run out of reserve tissue. Furthermore, kidney tissue, once lost, cannot be replaced. Even the ancient Chinese recognised this fact, thousands of years ago. (In Traditional Chinese interpretation, the kidneys store the *jing*, which is the substance most closely associated with life itself. It harbours the capacity for birth, maturation, decay and death. It progressively declines through life and, like the 'fuel' in your vehicle, once it is consumed or spent, the journey is over.) These points are important for an understanding of the scope of therapy, which will be discussed later.

Because the kidney is now failing to clear toxins at a healthy rate, by-products of metabolism accumulate. The most noticeable one of these, on account of its characteristic odour on the breath and on the skin, and arguably the most important, is **urea** (waste nitrogen compound). This is the metabolite which is measured in blood tests, in order to assess the day-to-day capability of the kidneys. **Creatinine** is another product of kidney insufficiency, after urea metabolism in the liver, and it allows an assessment of more long-term function and of prognosis. Specific thresholds are considered to denote the dog's chances of survival or otherwise.

The kidney receives approximately 80% of the output of blood from the left side of the heart. This means that there is likely to be a deleterious effect on the heart if the kidney is damaged, quite apart from the toxic effects suffered by all organs. This can sometimes be overlooked in assessment and in treatment. Furthermore, because of the kidney's requirements, a healthy heart output is essential to good kidney function.

When the disease is very advanced, all tissues become poisoned by the accumulation of urea in the blood. This is perhaps most noticeable in the mouth, where the gums become ulcerated and may bleed. The smell on the breath is, by this time, quite repugnant.

If the disease is unchecked, death eventually ensues, by heart and brain failure. It is, of course the suffering and possible death of the patient that we strive to avoid in our prescribing and by our advice.

Treatment

Treatment by homeopathy depends upon accurate observation of the signs of the disease and upon careful analysis of the patient. It also depends upon very careful [dietary management](#), in line with the *Organon*, §3 (written by Hahnemann, the founder of homeopathic medicine, in 1810) in which he says we must remove the ‘obstacles to recovery’ in all cases.

The outstanding symptoms and signs, shown by most patients with chronic renal disease in varying forms or degrees, are: *uraemia, heart symptoms, increased thirst, malodorous breath, sore mouth* with or without *ulcers, strangury, haematuria, inappetance, languidity, lack of exercise tolerance, proteinuria, weakness, urinary incontinence, loss of condition and weight* and *strong-smelling urine*. Our strategy must be to try to limit the progression of tissue destruction, to help the symptoms and to optimise the function of remaining kidney tissue. Our remedies must, therefore, incorporate both the known pathology and all of these symptoms, along with an understanding of individuality of symptom expression in each patient.

Remedies

Homeopathic constitutional remedies, which incorporate the picture of destructive pathology, along with a varying spread of the other symptoms, are: *Mercurius, Natrum mur., Arsenicum* and *Phosphorus*. It is likely that our kidney patient will need one of these medicines, prescribed according to patient typology. Homeopathy always requires diligent individualisation for best results.

Specific ‘local’ (organ) help and support, according to the prevalent signs and the patient’s individual expression, can be provided by one or other of:

Ammon. carb: frequent urination, involuntary urination at night, bloody urine, bubbly breathing.

Apis mell: retention of urine, fresh air hunger, tendency to oedema.

Baptisia: septicaemia, toxicity, low-grade fever.

Berberis: tendency to kidney stones, mucus in urine, back pain.

Cantharis: frequent painful urination, small quantities of urine, straining, blood.

Carbamide: Helps the elimination of urea and helps tissues withstand its toxic effects.

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Digitalis: increases the strength of the heart, increases renal clearance, urethritis with straining.

Eel serum: toxic oedema, albuminuria, haemoglobinuria, toxicity in heart and kidneys.

Eupatorium purp: tendency to urine gravel, dropsy, albuminuria.

Hydrastis: tenacious yellow mucus in urine, back pain, old, easily-fatigued patients.

Kali chlor: albuminuria, scanty urine, haematuria, bile pigments in urine, low specific gravity.

Petroselinum: sudden urge to urination, intense licking of vulva/prepuce, 'milky' urine.

Plumbum met: straining, abdominal pain, paresis, scanty urine passed in drops.

Urtica: urolithiasis, retained urine, urticaria.

In all cases, please remember that this very brief synopsis of remedies and their indications cannot do them justice. Do not be tempted to prescribe for your own animal, solely on the basis of these points. They are recorded more to show the great scope and capability of homeopathic prescribing than as a guide to effective prescribing.

Feeding

In renal disease, the most pressing problems are loss of water-soluble nutrients and accumulation of urea. The longer-term challenges are to support the body in the face of protein loss via the urine and to minimise ingestion of potential toxins. A fresh, home-prepared diet is best, in my opinion.

Vitamin B, Vitamin C, Vitamin K and the trace element minerals are therefore required in greater quantities. Supplementation is important. Something aimed more specifically to counter free radicals may also be helpful - grape seed extract for instance.

The urea story arises because we often feed excess protein for the body's requirements, or we may feed poor quality proteins. In either case, these molecules are split to give 'sugars' and nitrogenous waste (ammonia which is formed into urea in the liver). The art is to feed excellent quality protein, preferably organic, and to feed no more than one fifth of the overall daily food intake as a protein source. This should be estimated by fresh weight vs fresh weight, or dry weight vs dry weight. This mathematics can be confusing, so you may need professional help with this. In my opinion, stated clearly in my diet booklet, fresh and wholesome food, from a 'clean' source, is infinitely preferable to manufactured and processed commercial foods.

Because the kidneys are impaired, so is their elimination function. Such animals are much more susceptible to damage by day-to-day toxins. For some reason this is often overlooked when devising rations and in the daily management of the dog. Because of this factor, such measures as 'clean' (or 'organic') sources of food, removal of plastic bowls, avoidance of chemicals (e.g. flea treatments) and careful medication assume greater importance in these patients.

Herbs

Because of the long-standing traditions of [herbal medicine](#), there are inevitably some herbs which can be used. For those who know how to do this, these can be properly integrated with homeopathic medication. If you don't know how to do it, avoid the temptation.

Some possible herbs are: *Bearberry, Cranberry, Dandelion, Goldenrod, Gravel Root, Parsley, Water Cress*. *Barley water* also has a powerful reputation in this field.

Summary

The foregoing should leave no illusions about the potential seriousness of chronic renal disease. It should, however, provide hope where this may, otherwise, not often be forthcoming, and it should give you a chance to fight back, so long as your dog is a willing participant. In many cases, quality of life is restored and a natural life span can be enjoyed.

In any disease or old-age situation, however, the preservation of life is not to be an end *per se*. Rather we must always strive to enhance the quality of life, prolong as healthy a life as we can, while it is clearly what the patient wants, and allow the end to come with dignity when appropriate. This all seems a great deal easier under homeopathic management, it usually being clear what the patient wants. When the end is finally nigh, it can often happen naturally and peacefully, like the natural part of the life process that it is.

Christopher Day MRCVS – December 1999

Postscript: There may be an [autoimmune](#) component of kidney disease, in that kidney tissue cultures may be used in vaccine production.

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