

Homeopathy in the Ageing Dog
ALTERNATIVE VETERINARY MEDICINE CENTRE

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HOMEOPATHY IN THE AGEING DOG

A lovely old Border Collie was brought in to see me a few months ago. He had a bit of a problem with his skin, which his human companion wished to see cured. Bruce waddled into the consulting room with that air of authority and confidence that only a senior canine citizen can exude. He carefully and slowly creaked to a sitting position and looked up at me for some sort of approbation.

Of course, he received that, in spades. He was a fine, dignified, cheeky old fellow and endeared himself to me straight away.

"Bit creaky?" says I. The lady who had brought him in clearly doted on him and said, ruefully, "what else can we expect at his age?"

This brief interchange, under the scrutiny of this wonderful old dog, summed up for me so much that is wrong in our culture. What is this disease called 'old age'? Age is an accident of time and has NOTHING to do with disease. Only if we are not in balance, does our in-built 'health system' deteriorate as we age. There is absolutely no rule that says we have to suffer disease more, as we grow older. There is no rule that says we cannot die healthy, when our time runs out, when we reach the end of our rope. There is, of course, a natural ageing process of degeneration but this should not cause significant malfunction.

So it is for dogs, too. Give them a fresh, healthy and appropriate [diet](#), keep off the [over-vaccination bandwagon](#) (there is no science to support annual boosters and in fact there is evidence to the contrary), give them a loving and happy home, attend to any injuries promptly and thoroughly with natural healing methods, to prevent later complications and they will reward you with a healthy, active and fun-loving old age.

We are very fortunate at home. Our 15-year-old Terrier acts like a puppy. She has all her teeth. She is twice as knowing and artful as when she was a pup. She looks like she could go on for years. Long may she enjoy this sort of health. She

Homeopathy in the Ageing Dog - AVMC

is now seeing it as her duty to discipline our new 7-week-old Border Collie puppy rescue, who joined us last month.

Back to Bruce the Collie. His skin was flaky and smelly. His coat failed to shine. His nose was a bit dry and crusty. He had greying eyes, the signs of cataract. He was a little arthritic in his hips. All this spoke of the 'sycotic miasm' or 'sycosis', a pattern of disease which is a common enough sequel to dutiful revaccination throughout life. I examined him. His heart was good. His appetite was good. He had no trouble with stool and waterworks, apart from a tendency to wobble a bit when crouching and having difficulty lifting his leg, which was a bit humiliating for such a proud old chap. His tail carriage spoke to me of prostate trouble, so I checked him in that department and, sure enough, a swollen and sore prostate gland (also part of the sycotic miasm). Upon enquiring, I was told that yes, he had been a 'real boy' when younger and still was a bit of a lad. Definitely one for the ladies!

Modern wisdom might suggest castration, as the way forward. Homeopathic wisdom suggested *Thuja*. This remedy fitted so well with his whole symptom picture and, yes, he was feeling the cold a bit these days.

A full check at the **AVMC** includes a look at the back. His back and pelvis had some significant misalignments. Correction of these by [Chiropractic](#) manipulation immediately altered his demeanour and posture, in a seemingly miraculous way. Yes, Bruce was going to stage a significant recovery from most of his problems, I was sure. He may need [Acupuncture](#), later.

Just as the saying tells us: "We don't stop playing because we grow old, we grow old because we stop playing", so we must look at preventing 'old age' diseases, while the 'patient' is still in youth. Diet and lifestyle are desperately important. Bones to chew are essential to skeletal and dental health. If we have a dog, who has reached older age with many problems, because we didn't know about such things when he was younger, is it too late? The simple answer is "No". The body retains healing capacity up until death. It is true that we may not see 100% recovery, healing processes could be slower and the dog may not live long enough to complete the job. We should, however, be able to start a reversal, which should restore enough health to make life a lot more enjoyable and worthwhile.

What can [Homeopathy](#) offer the older dog, who is showing signs of wear and tear? *Rhus toxicodendron 6c*, twice daily, is wonderful for the stiffness that worsens in cold damp weather, is worse on rising and eases off with a little exercise. *Causticum* is a wonderful 'older dog' remedy. It suits stiffness worse for cold, bright weather and better for warm and damp conditions. More than this, it has strong indications in the weakness (and tendency to paralysis in

Homeopathy in the Ageing Dog - AVMC

extreme states) which some older dogs show and it will help certain 'canine stroke' cases. *Baryta carbonica* can suit the old chap who may be losing some of his marbles. Confusion and a tendency to overweight characterise it. *Ambra grisea* is well-suited to a general ageing and weariness. If the heart is playing up, rather than rush to high-tech pharmacological solutions as a first line, one can consider *Crataegus*, in 'mother tincture' form. It is a wonderful heart strengthener, along with that good old stand-by for the prevention or slowing of age-related degeneration, *Vitamin E*. In experienced hands, *Digitalis* in low potency can be invaluable in heart treatment. This can be a 'dangerous' drug, however, if not handled correctly, so caution is counselled. If there is a 'heart cough', from lung congestion, then *Apis mellifica* or *Spongia tosta* may have a part to play. [Herbs](#) may help in this case. *Taraxacum* (dandelion) is a great stand-by, as a herbal diuretic. There are, of course, other homeopathic treatments of use in heart conditions, but these few will do a great deal in most cases. If the kidneys are playing up, *Mercurius solubilis*, *Phosphorus* or *Kali chloricum* may be needed. If the hind legs are giving way, with no obvious pathology and no X-Ray signs, then *Conium* can prove useful. Constitutional remedies that are possibly better suited than many others to our notion of older dogs, who may have degenerative processes at work, are *Lycopodium*, *Sepia*, *Calcarea carbonica* and *Causticum*.

A natural part of life is death, however paradoxical that statement may seem. In the evening of life, it is inevitable that there is a risk of death. We must not begrudge our dear animal companions their final earthly journey. In a really healthy body, death appears to be organised, just as well as living is. Thankfully, a great many of my old patients find their own way out, in a time, place and manner of their own choosing. This is lovely when we stop to think about it. Horrible though it is to lose them, how comforting it is to know that they did not die a minute before they wished and did not suffer the so-called 'agonies' of death. I firmly believe that our modern lifestyle, diet and management culture lead to a decreasing chance of this natural and pain-free way out, for our beloved canine companions. If there appears to be a problem for the dying dog, when he appears to be unable to make up his mind which way he is wanting to go or cannot find the resources to help himself, then high potency *Arsenicum*, or in some dogs *Tarentula*, will often help decisions. If he is needing to join the spirit world, it will often enable him, gently and calmly, to do just that. If he really doesn't want to go, then it seems able to help him to bounce back with renewed vigour.

If all this fails and life has, sadly, become a burden to our friend, then it is our duty to help him on his way, with compassionate [euthanasia](#). This is usually done very sensitively by a veterinary surgeon. I would want my own dog to die at home and in my arms. Most vets will accommodate that sort of wish. Terrible

Homeopathy in the Ageing Dog - AVMC

though it is, to contemplate having to do this to our friend, we owe him the right to leave life just as he lived it, with dignity and composure.

In Bruce's case, we can shelve all thoughts of such things. He has bounced back in that really rewarding way some dogs seem able to do. Not only does he seem to be in very good health already, he also seems to be improving daily. Rock on!

P.S.: This article was written in February 2002. Sadly, neither the old terrier nor Bruce are now with us, in April 2007 but they each had a very full and busy life, right to the end.

Christopher Day – February 2002

See also:

[‘He’s Doing Well for his Age!’ WS122-07](#)

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