

Homeopathic Vaccines

Safeguarding public health is a key role of veterinarians, but it has, of late, grown far more complex. In particular, legislative changes in at least three states now allow non-veterinarians (i.e., chiropractors and acupuncturists) to serve as primary care providers for animals in the absence of veterinary referral and/or supervision. Because of this, veterinarians no longer have exclusivity in their defense of animal health. Difficult terrain looms ahead as the number of non-veterinarians occupying positions as licensed, animal primary care providers rises, despite their virtual lack of training in veterinary anatomy, physiology, pathology, infectious disease, pharmacology, etc. These recent changes to state practice acts have indeed set momentous, even dangerous precedents. On what basis can those states who have now granted licensure to non-veterinarians prevent all other human healthcare professionals (MDs, dentists, psychologists, etc.) from adding animals to their practices? What will be the effects on public health protection from zoonotic disease, for which veterinarians are uniquely trained and qualified to defend, as the “the first line of defense” from biologic attacks? ¹

Differences in professional training and ethics between diverse animal practitioners may present tough challenges to effective veterinary patient management, especially on the topic of vaccines. On the one hand, the American Veterinary Medical Association exhorts veterinarians to carefully and critically consider all sources of scientific information and expert opinion in order to properly customize the vaccine programs that their animal patients require.² On the other hand, what message, if any, do national non-veterinary professional organizations send to their members regarding animal health and disease? Consider that a random sample of all U.S. chiropractors showed that one third agreed with the statement claiming that there is no scientific proof that immunization prevents disease, that it causes more disease than it prevents, and that contracting an infectious disease is safer than immunization.³ Consider, too, that naturopaths in the State of Washington were reportedly opposed to routine human immunization because they believed it was “unnatural, unnecessary, and elitist”.⁴ Thus, non-veterinarian animal health care providers may jeopardize animal and public health due to an under-appreciation of the importance of animal vaccination and a widespread anti-vaccination bias.

¹ JAVMA News -- News Express. Veterinarians the “first line of defense” in biologic attack. April 8, 2003. Published in advance of the May 15, 2003 issue of *JAVMA*. Obtained at <http://www.avma.org/onnews/javma/newsexpress/x030515a.asp> on 04-11-03.

² American Veterinary Medical Association. Principles of Vaccination, approved by the AVMA Executive Board April, 2001. Obtained at <http://www.avma.org/policies/vaccination.htm> on 04-11-03.

³ Ernst E. The attitude against immunization within some branches of complementary medicine. *Eur J Pediatr.* 1997;156:513-515.

⁴ *Ibid.*

Concerns about over-vaccinating their animals have caused many people to consider complementary and alternative medical (CAM) options. The Internet provides a wealth of official and unofficial information pertaining to vaccines and vaccine replacements. Some websites suggest using homeopathy instead of conventional vaccines and even as a treatment for anthrax and smallpox assaults. [Homeopathic remedies consist of extremely dilute preparations of substances which, if given in larger dosages, would cause similar symptoms to that which the patient is currently experiencing. The mechanism of action of this approach is unknown, as in some cases the dilution of the substance is so great (i.e., “ultra-high dilution”) that the “homeopathic remedy” may contain no molecules from the original substance.] The National Center for Homeopathy provides several articles on its website that advocate the use of homeopathy for bioterrorist attacks.⁵ In response, the National Institutes of Health-National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine called such advice “misleading” and “dangerous”.⁶ The Federal Trade Commission has threatened legal action against those who operate websites claiming that a product or therapy is effective in the treatment or cure of anthrax, smallpox, or other bioterrorism substances, if it is “not substantiated by competent and reliable scientific evidence”.⁷

Is there any evidence that homeopathic “vaccines” or nosodes (serially agitated dilutions of made from excreta, vomitus, discharges, and diseased tissues from patients suffering from infectious diseases) provide a reliable and effective alternative to vaccines and antimicrobial compounds? Methodologic flaws exist in the numerous reports provided over the last two hundred years that claim that nosodes offer suitable prophylaxis to infectious disease.⁸ A study on veterinary nosodes showed failure to protect dogs from death due to parvoviral enteritis.⁹ If protection can be provided in certain instances, it appears to be weak and variable, compared to standard vaccination.¹⁰ If there is, then, no reliable evidence that homeopathic vaccines or other CAM approaches can as effectively immunize an individual as standard vaccines, would some non-veterinarian animal health care providers offer these approaches as viable alternatives anyway?

⁵ National Center for Homeopathy. Obtained at <http://www.homeopathic.org/crart.htm> on 03-26-03.

⁶ National Institutes of Health, National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine. Bioterrorism and CAM: What the public needs to know. November 20, 2001. Obtained at <http://nccam.nih.gov/health/alerts/bioterrorism/index.htm> on 04-05-03.

⁷ United States of America Federal Trade Commission, Bureau of Consumer Protection. Obtained at <http://www.ftc.gov/opa/2001/11/webwarnltr.htm> on 04-05-03

⁸ Jonas WB. Do homeopathic nosodes protect against infection? An experimental test. *Alternative Therapies*. 1999;5:36-40.

⁹ Larson LJ, Wynn S and Schultz RD. A canine parvovirus nosode study (abstr) in *Proceedings, 2nd Ann Midwest Holistic Vet Conf*. 1996; 98-99.

¹⁰ Jonas WB. Op. cit.

Immunization practices for human children have long been the subject of parental concern and legislative debate.¹¹ As the legal status of companion animals changes and more non-veterinarians with an anti-vaccine bias enter the ranks of animal primary care providers, clients may insist on more autonomy regarding whether their animal should or should not receive a standard vaccine. Will non-veterinarian primary care practitioners have any responsibility in the assurance of adequate animal vaccination and public health protection? Which disciplinary authority will take charge? How do standards of care and informed consent guidelines change when groups with strong anti-vaccination viewpoints legally practice alongside veterinarians?

Chiropractors comprise the third largest regulated health care professionals (after MD's and dentists) in North America, and as such, chiropractors and their political influence will likely "play an increasingly influential role in the formulation of societal perceptions of public health issues such as vaccination."¹² Eighty-two percent (82%) of chiropractors believe that chiropractic should be viewed as a complete system of health care.¹³ One of the founding fathers of chiropractic, BJ Palmer, tenaciously held to the belief that infectious disease was caused by spinal column "subluxations", and claimed that chiropractic adjustment could successfully treat smallpox.¹⁴ Some chiropractors still claim that "nothing appear to offer as great a benefit to the immune system as chiropractic care"¹⁵ although there is no convincing evidence of this. Chiropractors known as "straights" typically follow the original chiropractic doctrine that considers disease to be "the result of spinal nerve dysfunction caused by misplaced (subluxated) vertebrae"; they may "eschew both the germ theory of infectious disease and vaccination".¹⁶ Not all chiropractors reject vaccines; some chiropractors (called "mixers") have adopted a more scientific approach.

Nevertheless, what was once a battle within the chiropractic profession between the "straights" and the "mixers" may soon be affecting the veterinary profession. The American Veterinary Chiropractic Association (AVCA), the driving force behind acquiring licensure for "animal chiropractors", has as one of its main goals for the upcoming year: "Establish relationships with straight chiropractic colleges."¹⁷ The International Chiropractors Association is now "committed to

¹¹ Auge K. Campaign shooting to boost kids' shots. State, coalition push to increase immunization. *The Denver Post*. April 4, 2000.

¹² Campbell JB et al. Chiropractors and vaccination: a historical perspective. *Pediatrics*. 2000;105:1-8. Obtained at <http://www.pediatrics.org/cgi/content/full/105/4/e43>.

¹³ Hawk C et al. Use of complementary healthcare practices among chiropractors in the United States: a survey. *Alternative Therapies in Health and Medicine*. 1999; 5(1):56-62.

¹⁴ Campbell JB et al. Op. cit

¹⁵ Gunter GT. Immunization: a review for chiropractors. *Today's Chiropractor*. 1996; 15:15-18. Cited in Campbell JB, op. cit.

¹⁶ Campbell JB et al. Op. cit.

¹⁷ American Veterinary Chiropractic Association website. "AVCA Board Goals and Projects for Year Ahead". Obtained at http://www.animalchiropractic.org/joint_efforts_103/avca_board_goals.htm on 04-13-03.

the purposes of the AVCA”¹⁸. The ICA also opposes mandatory vaccination for children, favoring “natural immunity over artificial immunization”.¹⁹ In a policy statement on the issue of human vaccination, the ICA stated: “The International Chiropractors Association is supportive of a conscience clause or waiver in compulsory vaccination laws, providing an elective course of action for all regarding immunization, thereby allowing patients freedom of choice in matters affecting their bodies and health.”

Might it be time for the veterinary profession as a whole to consider the implications of allowing non-veterinarian practitioners to practice alongside veterinarians in the first-line treatment of animals? Would it be reasonable to focus, on a national level, on the pressing issue of non-veterinarian advancing inroads into the practice of veterinary medicine? A unified effort may be our profession’s only remaining hope of stemming this tide that may not only compromise animal health care, but also may pose dangers to human health as well.

¹⁸Harrison JD [ICA Legal Counsel]. Animal adjusting for chiropractors. Obtained at http://www.animalchiropractic.org/joint_efforts_103/james_harrison_ica.htm on 04-13-03.

¹⁹ ICA News and PR. “ICA takes strong stand on Iowa immunization issue”. Obtained at <http://www.chiropractic.org/news/immunization.htm> on 04-13-03.