

EVALUATING A CASE FOR CANNABIS THERAPY & PET OWNER COUNSELING

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The final section of this four-part series will provide participants with an opportunity to consolidate cannabis topics into a practical “use it tomorrow” level of confidence. Utilizing a case-centered format, participants will practice case workup, product evaluation and create administration and monitoring plans.

Evaluating a pet owner’s product choice

The evaluation of a cannabis product for any case should initially start with an assessment of that product’s legal status. Practitioners should be confident of the product’s origin, techniques used during manufacturing, and the product’s molecular profile in order to provide pet owners with product safety evaluation and efficacy guidance. Every cannabis product administered to an animal should be accompanied by a complete Certificate of Analysis (COA) to provide the practitioners with an accurate molecular profile as well as demonstrate freedom from contaminants such as pesticides, heavy metals, mold, bacteria and residual solvents.

Monitoring guidance

Veterinary health care teams should emphasize the importance of monitoring to assess either positive or negative trends that occur due to cannabis administration. Veterinarians should use their clinical judgment to protect the health and wellbeing of their patients – similar to the use of any other off-label medication or husbandry decision made by a pet owner.

Practitioners may consider implementing the following monitoring protocol or incorporating cannabis-use monitoring into existing protocols:

Baseline (prior to starting cannabis):

- Examination
- Screening labwork

3-4 weeks after reaching target dose

- Examination
- Screening labwork
- Drug level monitoring (as needed)

6 or 12 months (depending on concurrent diagnostic needs)

- Examination
- Screening labwork
- Drug level monitoring (as needed)

Although rare, the most commonly observed side effects from cannabis administration include sensitivity to light, sensitivity to sound, anxiety/restlessness, and gastrointestinal upset. Pet owners should be counseled carefully on the potential side effects from the specific product they have decided to administer, potential interaction with concurrent treatments, and be committed to carefully journaling administration and effects.

Case-based applications: epilepsy

The successful application of cannabis medicine in nervous system disorders requires a clear understanding of basic nervous system physiology as well as cannabinoid pharmacokinetics. The cross-synaptic, retrograde feedback system mediated by the CB1 receptors provides a mechanism for neuro-modulation throughout the nervous system. Nervous system conditions such as epilepsy frequently require the utilization of a complex spectrum product, consistent journaling by the pet owner, and careful monitoring of blood chemistries and concurrently administered drug levels.

Case-based applications: palliative care

Palliative care cases within veterinary medicine require careful navigation by the entire veterinary team. The progressive nature of these cases requires the veterinary team to implement a careful and consistent monitoring plan, provide emotional support to the pet's human family, and frequently review and update the treatment plan.

The complex cross-system involvement of palliative care cases makes them ideal candidates for cannabis medicine. However, administration protocols must be designed for each individual patient, updated frequently and respect the unique needs of the human family members. The range of products that can be applied in palliative care cases frequently spans the gamut of availability and multiple products may be required to meet the pet owner's treatment goals.

Case-based applications: pain control

The use of cannabis in pain control may be one of the most researched areas of veterinary cannabis medicine to date. However, the wide range of underlying mechanisms, the degree of control needed in each case, as well as the variation of patient response to individual products creates a wide range of clinical efficacy. Products that contain a higher ratio of CBD to THC may be effective in cases where mild pain control is desired, as an adjunct therapy, or for THC-sensitive patients. Conditions that have not responded to traditional pain control regimens and/or are not seeing success from CBD-dominant products frequently require the careful incorporation of higher THC levels or more complex molecular profiles.

Case-based applications: anxiety-related behaviors

Anxiety-related disorders can be frustrating for both the pet owners and the veterinary care team. Whether cannabis therapy is utilized as a primary treatment or an adjunct to traditional protocols, the assessment of the pet's holistic environment is essential. Anxiety and stress-related behaviors often have their foundation in other medical causes such as pain, as well as environmental stressors such as the household environment. Anxiety-related cases often respond well to CBD-dominant cannabis products. However, depending on the root cause, a well-balanced CBD:THC product with a full complement of terpene molecules is often required. These cases require patience, compassion, an intense level of client education and frequent communication with the pet owner. Pet owner journals are often one of the most important tools in ensuring a successful case outcome.

Harm reduction for the clinic tomorrow

HRE should be implemented any time the veterinary team becomes aware of a *client-initiated treatment* – and especially when a cannabis product is being utilized. The goal of the veterinary team should be to provide the education that respects the pet owner's decision and goals while emphasizes patient safety and wellbeing.

Be aware of the potential for interactions between cannabis and pharmaceutical drugs. Practitioners should be prepared to assess a client's product and dosing plan and intervene if concerned the product could pose a risk to the patient. Monitor pharmaceutical drugs doses and effects closely if an animal is also receiving a cannabis product.

Avoid the use of cannabis in young, pregnant or lactating animals. Use caution and implement careful monitoring for cardiac and renal insufficiency patients.

Instruct pet owners to avoid products that have extra additives, coloring or sweeteners. Pet owners should be carefully counseled to avoid products with known toxins such as xylitol, chocolate, raisins, etc.

Anytime a new medication is administered to an animal (including cannabis), pet owners should make time to carefully observe their pet's reaction in order to identify any negative effects. Instruct the pet owner to administer cannabis when the animal is normally calm and restful. Pet owners should start with a small amount and increase slowly to the desired dose.

References

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