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Invited presentation

How to approach behavioural problems in dogs

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Abstract

Veterinary clinical behavioural medicine deals with normal and abnormal behaviours of animals, which are highly influenced by genetic and social backgrounds as well as by environmental factors. Although most of the behavioural problems seen at the veterinary clinics can be classified under "normal species specific behavior" rather than "behavioural disorders", correct approach to any type of behavioural problem has a critical importance. It is well known that primary reason for pet relinquishment is abnormal behaviours as it has a strong potential to weaken the bond between the companion animal and its owner. Thus, every veterinarian should have an understanding of the behaviour to screen behavioural changes in their patients. While approaching behavioural problems in dogs, the first step is to eliminate any medical problems which may affect the behaviour. If there is no medical history, a detailed behavioural history should be taken to determine the behavioural diagnosis. Main aim of the diagnostic approach is to find out the emotional motivations underlying the behaviour. Thus, one should always focus on emotions rather than try to fix the behavior(s). Behavioural disorders are abnormal behaviors considering the age, breed and species specific characteristics. They are generally driven by emotional and pathological disorders. Although treatment varies depending on the behavioural history and environmental factors, the most important step is the prevention of problems. The common methods used in the treatment are habituation, desensitization, counter conditioning and shaping to change the negative emotional state of the animal. Medicine and natural products can be used to stabilize the emotional state and also to improve learning .

Keywords: behaviour, habituation, desensitization, dog