

Veterinarian takes alternative approach to animals



Kim Raff/The News & Advance

Lori Leonard treats Red the cat at Concord Veterinary Services. Leonard practices holistic veterinary medicine that treats the whole animal.

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CONCORD — When Lori Leonard was studying veterinary medicine in the 1980s at Purdue University, she didn't attach any fancy five-syllable terms to her way of thinking about animal care.

Leonard, the owner of Concord Veterinary Services, is not your average vet, though.

She says she can talk to your pet. Telepathically. We'll get there in a minute, though.

She describes her overall philosophy as holistic medicine — treatment of the whole animal instead of just the symptoms in one part of the body. She also practices homeopathy, which may include some nontraditional remedies such as herbs, animal products and minerals if she thinks that's the right course for the animal.

“I was frustrated in veterinary school,” she said. “We would go to a lecture and they would say, ‘OK, now we’re going to learn about legs. Here are all the things that can happen to a leg. There are joints, there are muscles, there are tendons, and bone and skin and all that.’ Then the next week we’d talk about the liver.”

“I got frustrated because they would talk as if this leg would walk into your practice. You’re not just going to get a liver coming in. That liver is part of that dog.”

Leonard opened her clinic in 1993 after graduating from veterinary school in 1989 and retiring as a lieutenant colonel from a 24-year career in the Air Force.

The first alternative medicine she offered was a simple joint supplement.

“That was really far out there for this area in ’93,” she said. “I almost lowered my voice.”

She has branched out to flower essences and Reiki, in which practitioners believe they can transfer energies through their hands into the bodies of sick patients.

Overall, she said, she is less focused on traditional medicines or vaccines and more on what she thinks is the right treatment for a particular patient. If an animal needs a so-called traditional treatment, she’ll recommend it, she said. But, she also cautions that there are times when traditional medicine and common treatments for common complaints can do more harm than good.

Itchy pets are a good example, she says. Instead of trying to figure out what is causing the itching — maybe the pet is allergic to its food — a common treatment may be to prescribe a steroid. The itching goes away, but the cause has not, she said. Years later, those steroids may take a toll on the liver and kidneys, leaving a much sicker animal, she said.

“I feel traditional medicine is more about symptom control than it is about health,” she said.

Paulette Bailey, whose cats visited Leonard last week, said it was her daughter’s own itchy dog and her dissatisfaction with another veterinarian that brought her to the clinic.

Bailey, who lives between Rustburg and Concord, once had a hobbled cat, she said. Another vet’s office in the Lynchburg area told her the cat had a broken leg and signs of cancer. Leonard, who did her own X-rays, told her the cat had a pulled muscle.

Sure enough, Bailey said, the cat is fine. No cancer. No broken leg.

“We like her and the people that work there,” she said. “We like the atmosphere. I trust her knowledge.”

Leonard said not everyone has such a welcoming reaction to some of her alternative-medicine suggestions.

“I’m not trying to shove something down people’s throats,” she said. “I try to be respectful of what they want. More people are coming in here that are more willing to do alternative stuff, though.”

Then there's the telepathic communication.

"I tell people, it's like having a phone call," she said. "I do it with my eyes closed, and I do it silently."

Everyone can do it, she said, describing it as an almost-vestigial ability dating to prehistoric times when humans lived much closer to the land and other animals. Clients request it most often, she said, when their pet may be dying but sometimes for more upbeat reasons.

"Usually the animals are kind of surprised," she said. "Usually they think it's pretty cool."