

HOLISTIC VET Provides Animal Care

from the heart

by Karen Adams

*"It is only with the heart that one can see rightly.
What is essential is invisible to the eye."*

—Antoine de Saint-Exupery

Whenever an animal in need arrives at the central Virginia office of holistic vet Dr. Lori Leonard, one of the first things she does is ask what's going on in the animal's life. If a dog comes in with an upset stomach, for example, it may be a true illness. "Or it may just be that he's stressed out," Leonard says. "Maybe he lives with two type-A adults and three noisy kids under the age of 8."

Leonard once saw a dog that had been barking for hours at a blank wall in its home. She asked the exasperated owner if anything had changed in the dog's life, and the woman said a picture

that had always hung on that wall had been removed. "Well, he's telling you that the picture is missing," Leonard said sympathetically. The woman's eyes filled with tears: she had thought that very thing and nobody else had believed her. She had been told the dog was neurotic and sick.

As a holistic vet, Leonard considers the whole animal, not just its ailment. She comes by it naturally. During vet school at Purdue University in the late 1980s, her instructors would say, for example, "This is a neck," and lecture

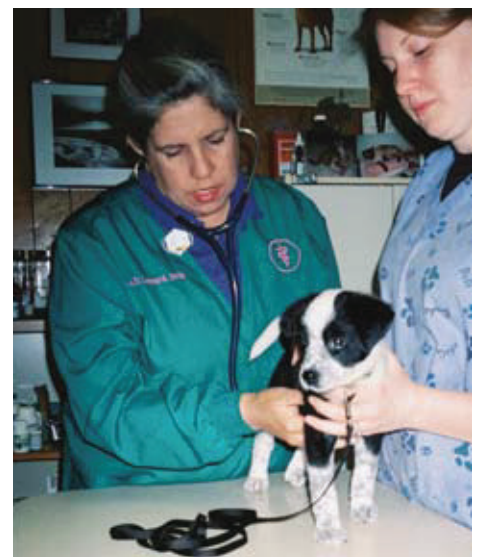
Leonard with one of her patients

about it. But Leonard would think, "That's not just a neck. It's attached to a cow. It's a cow with a sore neck." "Even in vet school, I wanted to know 'What is going on with this animal? What is the cause of this problem?'" she says.

As her intuition—and eventual holistic training—told her, the ailment is not separate from the animal or its life situation. And, while Leonard may offer traditional treatment if the situation calls for it, she usually tries a natural approach first: lifestyle changes, Reiki (energy healing), homeopathy, flower essences or herbal tinctures. Many times, a gentle, natural approach is all an animal needs to get itself back in balance. "My goal is preserving health, instead of preventing disease," she explains.

In 1993, when she opened her clinic in Concord, near Lynchburg, there was some local skepticism about her approach, which combined traditional with holistic medicine. But in the past 18 years her patient list has continued to grow, and her loving connection to animals speaks for itself. Besides her training from Purdue, she recently earned a degree in homeopathic veterinary medicine upon completing two years of study in England.

Leonard has seen many animals in need: dogs, cats, birds, rabbits, turtles, snakes, cattle, horses, pigs, alpacas, llamas and more. Trained as a wildlife rehabilitator, she has worked with birds of prey. She also once treated a lost migrating loon, whose wild call echoed through the clinic, much to the surprise of the other animals and people there.



The Sticky Side of Non-Stick Cookware

Compounds in non-stick cookware may be associated with elevated levels of cholesterol in children and teens, according to West Virginia University School of Medicine research published in Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine.



An earlier national survey had found a near universal presence of perfluoroalkyl acids (PFOA) in Americans' blood serum; these chemicals are used in the manufacture of fluoropolymers, which facilitate non-stick heat resistance for cookware and breathable, waterproof properties for clothing fabrics, carpet and upholstery.

In the university study, which examined 12,476 Ohio River Valley youth exposed to PFOA-contaminated drinking water, one in five not only had significantly higher PFOA levels than the national average, but relatively higher total cholesterol levels, including LDL (low-density lipoprotein), or "bad" cholesterol, as well. More research is needed.

Source: JAMA and Archives Journals



Leonard and office cat "Bud E"

She also works with wild animals at a carnivore sanctuary in North Carolina. Her office is home to two animals that were left on her porch: a brown and white tabby named Bud E and a white dove ("our symbol of peace," she says) named Ms. Dove.

Much of the time, Leonard explains, animals can heal themselves and recover from stress if they are given what they need and supported with a high-quality diet that boosts their immune systems. "In the wild, animals know how to heal themselves; it's in their DNA," she says. "If a cow's got a swollen leg, she'll stand in a creek. It has a whirlpool effect. When she gets out, the swelling is gone and she feels better. There are ways to make these animals whole again, and it's not always about reaching for steroids or antibiotics."

Perhaps more than anything else, Leonard listens to her patients with her heart. She has a clear, strong connection with animals that lets her know what they need. "In their own way, they quietly tell me what's wrong," she says. Many times, they are sad and even grieving, if they have lost a beloved human or animal companion. Leonard, who once worked as a hospice volunteer, can tell immediately if an animal is in mourning and what to do about it.

Owners often are amazed at what Leonard teaches them about the animal companions they thought they knew. Leonard has sensed that a pet is lonely, for example, only to have the owner explain that a new job schedule now means the pet is alone all day for the first time. Leonard also has seen dogs mimic the health problems of their owners; heart murmurs and seizures are not uncommon. "Many times, the pet is taking on the burden of the human," she explains. "They have that much unconditional love. They're trying to help their people."

Often, the problem is smaller than the owner may think. Many humans in Leonard's office have burst into tears of relief upon learning that their beloved pet doesn't need to be put to sleep, despite what they may have been told elsewhere. The animal may just need a new diet or some herbal remedy—or simply more love and attention.

Leonard's work is a "sacred duty," she says, from which she receives far more than she gives. "The animals bless me with their open hearts, and I return the love," she says.

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