

Educating Clients on Veterinary Acupuncture

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Veterinary acupuncture

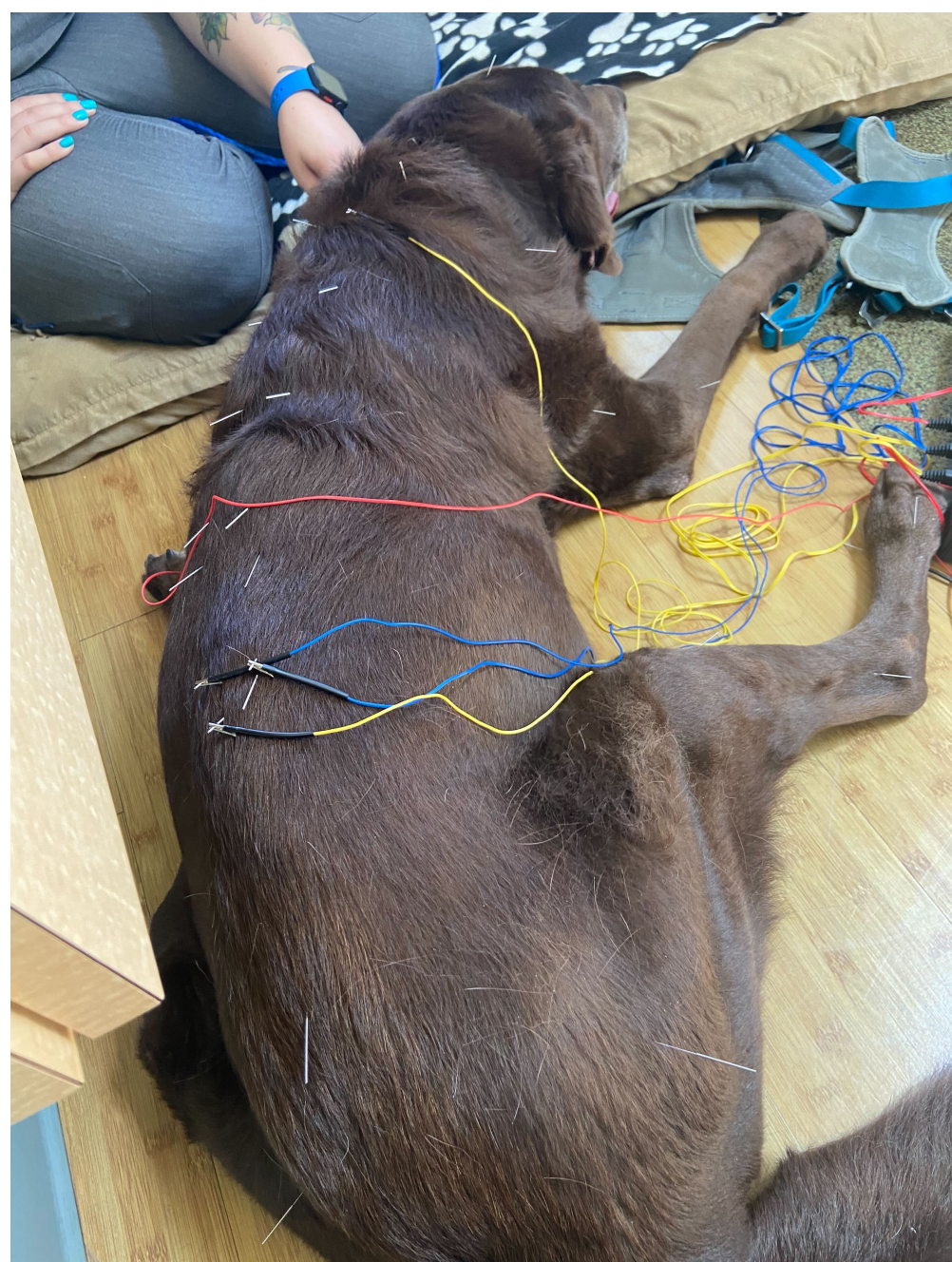
The complementary medical practice of acupuncture uses needle pricking to address pain as well as a variety of bodily, mental, and social conditions. Acupuncture is a technique that originated in ancient China and is now widely used in the West. Numerous studies have shown that stimulating acupoints results in the production of additional hormones like serotonin and beta-endorphin that help regulate mood and alleviate pain, respectively. Qi (pronounced "chee") is the body's energy. There are two opposite forms of Qi: Yin and Yang. In ancient Chinese principles, a constant flow of Qi keeps the Yin and Yang states in equilibrium. When the body is ill or under stress, this equilibrium is interrupted. Acupuncture aids in reestablishing the balance of Yin and Yang as well as the movement of Qi. When performed by a certified veterinarian, acupuncture is a very safe medical practice. A properly administered course of acupuncture may result in localized muscle contraction and slight distention. However, majority of patients—over 95%—find acupuncture treatment to be relaxing. During an acupuncture session, some animals fall asleep. Before receiving acupuncture therapy, sedation is not advised because it could diminish the effectiveness of the treatment. Acupuncture can be administered to small (canine and feline), large (horses) and exotic (rabbits and birds) animals. Many clients are not aware that acupuncture can be an option for their pets to help with pain, arthritis, joint inflammation, diabetes, or other chronic illnesses.

How does it work?

Pender offers three types of acupuncture: dry needling, aquapuncture, and electro-stimulation.

- **Dry needling** is the process of stimulating acupoints with a thin metal needle. This helps the body release natural chemicals into the muscles and central nervous system while restoring Qi movement.
- **Aquapuncture** involves placing Vitamin B12 into an acupuncture point to help keep pressure on the point for a longer period. It is useful for those who are sensitive to needles.
- **Electro-stimulation** uses small electric currents to enhance the benefits of dry needling. In order to deliver electric pulses, acupuncture needles are inserted into the body and linked via wire and tiny clips to a device. Several sets of needles are connected simultaneously to make sure all the acupoints are stimulated.

Depending on the severity and type of problem, a series of 4 to 10 treatments can show significant results, however, some conditions require monthly treatments. Each session may take up to 60 minutes depending on the pet's comfort level. Owners are present when treatment is given. Soothing music and reinforcements (e.g., treats) are provided to give the pet a positive experience. Doctors start with dry needling in the first session and then build up to electro-stimulation depending on the pet's comfort level.



Electro-stimulation on a 10-year-old brown Labrador (left) with Hip Dysplasia to treat pain. Electro-stimulation on an 8-year-old cocker spaniel (right) with Intervertebral Disc Disease (IVDD) to treat discomfort.

Advertising Campaign

When I first started working at Pender, acupuncture services were new to the hospital. They only had 2 veterinarians certified in veterinary acupuncture and just recently they hired 2 more veterinarians that have this certificate. Due to this, they have not started to advertise this service and only had 8 acupuncture clients. During winter break, I shadowed Dr. Adesso in her acupuncture appointments and learned about how acupuncture is performed. I also asked acupuncture clients to take a survey to ask them about their visit. I collected information from all acupuncture clients at Pender, below I have summarized the data:

- **Pet species:** Mostly dogs (6) and rabbits (4)
- **Average pet age:** all patients were in the senior age
- **Medical conditions:** most patients came in for musculoskeletal disorders (e.g., arthritis, joint disease, hip dysplasia)
- **Changes after acupuncture:** clients saw improvement in patient's activity levels, movements, and behavior
 - Quote from a client: "Dr Adesso was amazing when she did acupuncture on our German shepherd. She definitely felt better afterwards with her joint pain and inflammation. She loved looking out the windows while she let Dr Adesso do whatever she wanted to!"

I used this data to generate a social media ad and a brochure to educate and bring clients in. I also did further research to make the brochure informative and understandable to all clients.

Brochure and Social Media Ad





Brochure (left side, 2 pictures) I made to hand out to clients and was placed in the waiting area. This brochure was also handed out by other doctors at Pender if they recommended acupuncture as another option to treat their patients.

Advertisement (right side) I made for Pender's acupuncture services. This ad was posted in their website, Facebook, and Instagram. I also printed this and made it into a flyer to post around local pet grooming facilities in the NOVA area.

Responsibilities

While I was at Pender I also worked as a veterinarian assistant and receptionist. Other tasks I did include:

- Animal restraints for wellness checks, x-rays, ultrasound, vaccinations, and acupuncture
- Sterilize equipment and clean examination tables and rooms
- Check in clients, take medical history, obtain patient vital signs
- Answer phones and make appointments as needed
- Clean and change bedding in cages
- Feed, take weight, and walk dogs on scheduled times
- Administer oral medications prescribed by doctors when animal is boarding

Conclusion



The picture above shows me helping Dr. Adesso with an acupuncture patient. This experience taught me the business side of running a veterinary hospital. I was able to learn about the roles of a communication manager and teach clients about a new method of treatment. I gained experience in an area that I have never explored before. The best part about this experience was that I could provide clients with another option to help their pets discomfort or pain. Communication was key in this experience, and I formed great relationships with the staff.

Results

I finished both the ad and the brochure mid-February. Since then, Pender has reported a 3% increase in client calls asking more information about the veterinary acupuncture service they offer. Majority of the calls were canine and feline related. There was no increase in exotic pet related calls. Results:

- **Exotic pets:** gained a new acupuncture client who has a pet cockatoo
- **Companion animals:** gained 5 new acupuncture clients (3 canine and 2 feline)
- **Reason for acupuncture treatment:**
 - All acupuncture clients have pets that experienced either neurological disorders, gastrointestinal disorders, or musculoskeletal problems.
 - No patient from Pender had acupuncture treatment for behavioral problems.
 - All previous and new clients had senior animals that were dealing with pain or discomfort.

In the time I was present for a client's 4th session, they would always communicate to us that they could see improvement after the 2nd session.

Acknowledgments

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Any Questions?

