

Rene Drumheller

28 July 2011

American Pets, Eastern Medicine: Atsugi Pets Experience Acupuncture

Few animals relax and fall asleep in a vet's office, let alone with a dozen needles stuck along their spines. A grey domestic shorthair named Smokey accepts the metal needles the first time by lying down, stretching out and falling asleep.

"I've rarely seen a cat react like this." Reservist LTC Marta Acha, Doctor Veterinary Medicine at Camp Zama Veterinary Treatment Facility, a board certified veterinary acupuncturist with 20 years of small animal clinical experience said. "The other cat's reaction is more typical."

Tigger, Smokey's brother, allowed all the needles but squirms around and stays alert during his 10-30 minute treatment sessions. Dr. Acha began treating the felines in April during her six-month rotation in Japan at the clinic.

According to the information Acha gives patients, Acupuncture is a system of medicine that is over 4,000 years old and is useful alone or along side conventional medicines. The traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) philosophy teaches disease is an imbalance of energy. Balancing the energy using the body's energy channels or meridians can relieve pain by releasing endorphins and restore health by reducing muscle spasms or increasing blood circulation.

Acha starts each treatment with a western medicine style exam checking heart rate, temperature, teeth and eyes. Based on this initial exam, the acupuncturist tailors the treatment for specific illnesses and overall health modifying the needles as necessary and as the animal improves.

The acupuncture portion of the treatment begins by inserting one of the stainless steel needles in the calming point located on the animal's head. Fine gauged needles come sterilized and sealed in packages and are only used one time.

Once the first point is inserted into the animal's head and begins to relax, Acha feels down the spine inserting points. In a first session, she used fewer points to determine how the pet would react to the needling. Once she knows how an animal reacts, more points are added with each visit.

Acha is using a technique called Circling the Dragon to address the fatty cyst on Smokey's back. She chooses to place the needles around the lipome to bring the body's attention to the problem by increasing blood flow and alleviating any pain.

"The most changes happen with the first treatment." Acha said. "Animals are very responsive." Depending on the animal's problem, usually four treatments are given. After the fourth treatment most of the following acupuncture sessions are for maintenance. Treatments are given several weeks apart so owners can observe pets and the animal can assimilate the treatment.

Ann Dohm from NAF Atsugi also began taking her dog, Elton to acupuncture because of his limp. "Dr. Acha thought it was probably an ACL sprain/tear. Pain meds didn't help and just upset his stomach."

Mrs. Dohm has never tried acupuncture on herself or a pet before, but figured it couldn't hurt. "I did notice an improvement after a couple of treatments," though she was initially a little skeptical.

Elton hasn't had a treatment in a while but Mrs. Dohm notices 2 or 3 weeks ago he started to put weight on his injured right leg and lift his leg up to potty again. She also was concerned about his allergies. She hasn't noticed any improvement with the allergies, but is happy "now he is able to jump up on our little recliner for some cuddle time with me."

Acha will be at the clinic through October. Appointments are limited since she is also conducting food inspections throughout the country. Contact the Camp Zama Veterinary Treatment Facility at DSN 263-3875 or 046-407-3875 for more information.