

USING COMPLEMENTARY AND ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE (CAM) FOR LIVESTOCK



Photo: ORC

PROBLEM

Antimicrobial resistance in disease-causing bacteria and anthelmintic resistance in gastrointestinal parasites from systematic use and inappropriate use of antibiotics and anthelmintics.

Treatments start when a disease is sufficiently advanced to be considered justifying a visit from a veterinarian rather than at the first signs of disease.

SOLUTION

Appropriate use of non-conventional, complementary and alternative medicines, such as herbal remedies and homoeopathy.

OUTCOME

Complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) can be particularly successful when treatment begins in the early stages of disease. Appropriate use may reduce or prevent the need for using conventional medicines. They may also improve recovery time or address aspects of a disease not covered by the conventional medicine.

PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

IMPLEMENTATION

- Owners and carers of farm animals may treat stock with medicines outside of the category POM-Vs (Prescription-only Medicine – Veterinarian)
- CAMs are outside the POM-V category and cover a wide range of treatment approaches
- Medicines used for complementary and alternative treatments are typically but not exclusively plant or mineral based and include herbal medicines, such as ayurvedic medicine, and homoeopathy
- CAMs may only be administered externally, orally or as a nasal spray
- Understanding how each CAM functions is important when determining how and when each approach may be used to promote a return to health

APPLICABILITY

Applicable production types



Application time

CAM are typically most effective if treatments begin during the early stages of disease or recovery period. However, their use may be appropriate at all stages of disease, acute or chronic.

Required time

Treatment times using CAMs can be of varying lengths but may be of longer duration compared to conventional medicine.

Regulatory compliance

Compliance for treating animals in UK is covered by Section 19 of the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 which states that "All forms of complementary therapy that involve acts or the practise of veterinary surgery must be under-taken by a veterinary surgeon, subject to any exemption in the Act." Exemptions include; "4) The owners of farm animals, and people engaged or employed in caring for farm animals, (who) may give them medical treatment..."

Equipment/resource required

Since CAMs are administered orally, externally or as a nasal spray, very little equipment is required other than the medicines themselves, in appropriate containers, correct storage facilities and a good recording system.

Best in

Flocks and herds where an animal carer has sound knowledge of individual animals where early signs of disease can be detected and where the management system enables carers to carry out individual animal care.



- Knowing animals within each herd or flock is important to recognise behaviour changes associated with the onset of disease
- Housing or management systems should be designed so that carers can treat individual animals
- There are organisations that can provide support including the British Association of Veterinary Herbalists (BAVH) and the British Association of Homoeopathic Veterinary Surgeons (BAHVS)
- There are groups such as Homoeopathy at Wellie Level (HAWL) who offer courses that focus on animal carers treating animals in a farm setting

The Traffic Light Approach (Auckland, no date) illustrates how the use of conventional medicine can be avoided or reduced by treating animals with CAMs both during the early stages of disease (Green to Amber) and by improving healing responses after conventional medical intervention (Red to Amber to Green).



RED is where conventional treatment is necessary

AMBER is where complementary and alternative medicines can be used to improve healing responses.

GREEN is where there is good health through good husbandry and good hygiene

EASE OF ADOPTION ON NON-ORGANIC FARMS

- Adoption of CAM in a treatment repertoire need not be determined by organic/non-organic status although a level of negativity towards CAMs persists in both the conventional farming and veterinarian communities and any adoption at the farm level may require a change in mindset.
- For many CAMs, a system that allows for the treatment of individual animals is required, including sufficient time, as well as knowledge of the CAM being used. Using CAMs also requires good stock-caring skills with a sound knowledge of the herd/flock. The larger the animal group, the more difficult it can be to catch and control disease in its early stages.

BENEFITS OF IMPLEMENTATION

- Environmental benefits from a reduction in pollution from chemical-based anthelmintics and antibiotics
- Economic benefits from learning how to keep animals healthy and productive for longer
- Social sustainability gains from being able to advertise the animal welfare and environmental benefits to customers
- Social sustainability from controlling/reducing bacterial resistance to antibiotics

DRAWBACKS OF IMPLEMENTATION

- Barriers include system designs that do not enable animal carers sufficient time or space to observe and to know animals in order to assess individual health status.
- Systems that do not allow access or time to treat individual animals.
- Learning how and when to use CAMs can be time consuming.

BARRIERS AND RISKS

- Barriers can include the long-standing, negative attitude to CAMs in parts of both the farming and veterinary professions. Increasing dialogue between conventional and organic farmers can be a way to break down barriers. However, if a veterinarian is unsupportive, it may either inhibit the adoption of CAMs or risk a weakening of the farmer-veterinarian relationship.
- Use of CAMs requires knowledge of the animal being treated and the medicine being used – including its limitations. Where this knowledge is lacking, or limited, there is a risk of CAMs being used inappropriately, increasing the risk of poor animal welfare.



FINANCIAL ANALYSIS

A large number of very different scenarios can be related with the adoption of this practice. Therefore the financial implications of using complementary and alternative medicines were not assessed.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Video

Intelligent use of herbs in animal husbandry, Nick Thomson MRCVS Holisticvet Ltd.:
Part 1: <https://youtu.be/Rg7sdYslqSA> Part 2: <https://youtu.be/zTgiINKZLm8>

Further reading and weblinks

- Setting veterinary standards, Code of Professional Conduct (updated 2018) Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons. <https://tinyurl.com/RCVS-guidance>
- British Association of Veterinary Herbalists. <http://www.herbalvets.org.uk/>
- British Association of Homoeopathic Veterinary Surgeons. <https://www.bahvs.com/>
- Homoeopathy at Wellie Level. <https://hawl.co.uk/>
- Auckland C. MRCVS Holistic Lifepath. <http://www.holisticlifepath.co.uk/>
- Thompson N. MRCVS holisticvet. <http://holisticvet.co.uk/index.php/herbal-medicine/>

CASE STUDY FARMER APPLYING THE PRACTICE: A DORSET FARM

Location: Dorset

Enterprises: Sheep

“When we go back through the vet med records... ..it’s heartening to see how few entries there are now and the list of remedies we have used to good effect.

“As the years go by and our knowledge increases, so does our confidence that we’re making the right decisions. For us, it’s not been about costs but as I think back... ..I realise that we have also saved a fortune.

“During lambing time, the ewes were suffering from an outbreak of New Forest disease (Pink Eye) which spread quickly through the twins and singles groups with some ewes becoming blind. A homoeopathic veterinarian helped to determine the correct remedies for four different stages of the disease. Affected ewes were separated from healthy ewes to prevent spreading and split again into treatment groups. In all, nine different remedies were used and all ewes responded to the treatments given.”

From: HAWL website.

<https://hawl.co.uk/pink-eye-new-forest-eye-success-with-homeopathic-remedies-in-sheep/>

ABOUT THIS PRACTICE ABSTRACT

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