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JIVT: An introduction

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Aggressive Pomeranian Treated with Chinese Herbal Formula

Daren C Auger DVM CVCHM



Abstract

A male neutered Pomeranian was presented for fear aggression issues. Treatment using a single Chinese herbal formula was used based on his Traditional Chinese Veterinary Medicine (TCVM) pattern analysis. Significant improvement in his condition was achieved.

Signalment

'Gizmo' is an eight-year-old male neutered Pomeranian. His weight on presentation was 7 kg.

Diagnosis

Gizmo presented for annual examination and to discuss aggression issues that had been occurring over the last year. He suffers from seasonal (fall) atopic dermatitis and is currently on Eltroxin (Levothyroxine) 0.1 mg twice daily for hypothyroidism. The owner had noted that his seasonal atopic signs were occurring earlier every year and the signs seemed more intense this year.

He is always very difficult to examine,

requiring a muzzle for a full physical examination. The owner had mentioned that Gizmo was becoming more aggressive towards her grandchildren as well, to the point that she now segregates him into another room when they visit. She is very concerned. He will run up to them, bark and growl then runs away if they approach. He has had skin issues with seborrhoea sicca, poor hair regrowth and a thin dry dandruff with mild pruritus. Pruritus intensifies in fall. He seems to dream more when allergies flare up, according to owner.

Previous medical history includes occasional vomiting and soft stool. Owner reports separation anxiety at home. Gizmo has presented to me in the past with red inflamed ears but every time he comes in there's no discharge, just erythema. Vaccines were up to date (DA2PP + Rabies). Previous medical history showed that Gizmo suffered from occasional gastrointestinal issues including vomiting, soft stools, borborygmus and belching. His appetite is good, however he has lost 1 kg since last examination. The owner reports a slightly increased amount of drinking recently as well.

His Chinese medical examination revealed that on presentation Gizmo was very anxious in the exam room, even after being muzzled. He had seborrhoea sicca with small white powdery dander, not overtly itchy but the owner says he will scratch a lot at home. His eyes were red and intense from anxiety, somewhat bulging (intra-ocular pressures were within normal limits). The owner mentioned he would rub at his face, primarily along the side of the muzzle. This was evident during the examination where Gizmo would rub the sides of his face against the owner's hands. Gizmo



resented being picked up to be put on the table for exam, and would turn trying to bite. There were mild dry colarettes present on his ventral abdomen and inner thigh regions. His pulse was rapid, thin and wiry. His tongue was pale, slightly lavender, thin and dry.

A Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) diagnosis was made based on clinical findings and pattern differentiation. Gizmo had Liver Blood and Yin deficiency, Liver Qi Stagnation and Liver Overacting on Stomach. A western diagnosis of Fear Aggression, Seasonal Atopic Dermatitis (SAD), Seborrhoea Sicca and Hypothyroidism were made based on present and previous medical history.

Treatment

Yi Guan Jian (YGJ) also referred in the literature as 'One Linking Decoction', or 'Glehnia and Rehmannia Combination', was the herbal formula chosen to address Gizmo's TCVM pattern. The dose rate prescribed was 1/8th heaped teaspoon of powdered granules (www.nphc.ca) orally twice daily given mixed in food for three weeks. Clinical reassessment and TCVM pattern differentiation would determine the length of the treatment regime.

The main effects of YGJ are to Tonify Blood/ Yin and secondarily soothe Liver Qi. YGJ is designed to address Liver Blood deficiency leading to gastro-intestinal problems. It also treats Yin deficiencies, allowing it to yield excellent results in various behavioral disorders. In Gizmo's case there were clear Blood Deficiency signs such as pale lavender tongue, wiry pulse and skin symptoms. There was also evidence of Yin deficiency (red eyes, empty heat), weight loss with good appetite as well as increased thirst.



The Rehmannia (*Sheng Di Huang* - pictured), Glehnia (*Bei Sha Shen*) and Ophiopogon (*Mai Men Dong*) act to tonify the Yin in all three burners. The Lycium (*Gou Qi Zi*) tonifies the Liver Yin as well. With the Liver Blood deficiency comes stagnation (resents being picked up, GI signs) which influences the stomach, Wood Over controlling Earth from a five-phase theory perspective, leading to some of the stagnant/rebellious Qi signs (vomiting, belching, borborygmus). The Melia (*Chuan Lian Zi*) helps as the Qi mover in this formula. There were not any overt damp signs in this case, which would be contraindicated for YGJ.

Results

Gizmo returned three weeks after his initial presentation for reassessment. He seemed brighter and less anxious in the examination room. He did not appear to have the distressed look in his eyes previously noted during exams. The owner had remarked that his attitude was



improved towards other people, however her grandchildren had not visited since the last exam. Appetite and bowels were normal during the herbal therapy. The owner had noted reduced belching at home. Pruritus was still present, but no worse. He enjoyed going for his walk and did not seem to be shying away from people. He would growl occasionally when people approached but, according to the owner, the episodes would not be as intense as before.

On physical examination Gizmo was bright and alert, much more relaxed and appeared less stressed. His appetite had improved and he had gained 550g. I was able to give him a complete physical examination without necessitating a muzzle. The anxious look in his eyes was absent. His dander had improved. Pulse was no longer rapid but was still wiry. Tongue was pale on the sides and slightly lavender in the center. Although the pattern had improved, it had not significantly changed and it was elected to continue the current therapy for another four weeks until the next reassessment. The owner was very happy with the clinical improvement to date, especially where aggression was concerned. Her grandchildren were expected to visit in another 10 days. She would update me after that.

Two weeks later the owner called to advise that the visit with her grandchildren went better than anticipated. Gizmo was secluded in his room until the children were settled in and then let out. Gizmo greeted the children with a wagging tail and only slight reservation. There was no barking or growling. By the end of their visit, Gizmo was playing with the grandchildren – something that had not occurred for the

last two years. The owner was ecstatic. Gizmo is due for his next reassessment in three weeks.

Discussion

Fears can develop for many reasons including, but not limited to, genetics, traumatic early experiences, inadequate early exposure, repeated exposure to fearful stimuli or owner fostering. Fearful behavior is often maintained by genetic factors, ongoing exposure to the stimulus and owner responses. Fear aggression and behavioral issues are very common complaints from owners in small animal practice. They represent a major decision factor in euthanasia decisions as well. Usually by the time they are addressed, they have been occurring for a protracted period of time. There is much frustration as well as urgency imposed on the small animal practitioner to address and correct these problems. Many behavior problems in dogs are a result of underlying fears or anxieties.

Fearful and anxious dogs present a challenge to practitioners and owners alike. Their presentation can be variable, from hiding, shaking, panting and pacing, to aggression. Dogs with fearful or phobic behaviors can pose risks to people, property, themselves and other dogs. Western treatment protocols can include habituation, desensitization and counter conditioning. For some dogs with extreme fears, drug therapy may be indicated. Through the use of behavioral modification and TCVM modalities, we are now able to approach these issues with an alternative modality to help re-establish the natural internal balance within our patients. This internal harmony will allow a better interaction with their



external environments (Marsden 2003). In TCVM there is an inseparable interplay between mental activity and organic internal function, such that internal body disharmonies can manifest as mental disorders (Marsden, pers comm) (Weber 1997).

Gizmo's first TCVM diagnosis was Blood Deficiency. Blood is one of the principal substances of the body. It functions to nourish and support the internal organs and maintains the functions and structures of the body, including the brain (Marsden 2003) (Xie 2007) (Yang 2010). The Heart, Liver, Kidneys and Spleen directly influence the generation of Blood. The Heart governs the Blood and promotes its circulation; the Liver Stores the Blood, the Kidneys Store Essence which can be transformed into Blood and the Spleen is able to transform food into Qi and Blood and is considered the main source of Liver Blood (Xie 2007). The causes of Blood Deficiency are linked directly with deficiency of any one or combination of these four organs. It is often seen in chronic disease states as well as with improper diet (Yang 2010). Sufficient Blood is the basis of free and smooth flow of Liver Qi. The Blood Deficiency in Gizmo's case was more than likely the underlying cause of stagnant Qi flow through the Liver. This expressed itself as the epigastric discomfort expressed during the physical examination. Finally, when Liver Qi Stagnates, the ability of the Spleen Qi to naturally flow upwards becomes disrupted. These will exhibit itself with continued epigastric discomfort, altered appetite and soft stool.

The use of Yi Guan Jian significantly improved the outcome of this case. The formula's main effect is to tonify Blood

and Yin (Xie 2010). This accounted for the majority of Gizmo's TCVM pattern differentiation. Over the course of treatment, there was significant improvement in not only the behavioral component of his condition but also the secondary dermatologic and body condition. Yi Guan Jian (One Linking Decoction) contains the following herbs: fresh Rehmannia (Sheng Di Huang), Glehnia (Bei Sha Shen), Ophiopogon (Mai Men Dong), Angelica sinensis (Dang Gui), Lycium (Gou Qi Zi) and Melia (Chuan Lian Zi). Research into the individual components of this herbal formula could clarify the beneficial effects of this formula, especially for behavioral issues.

Rehmannia is used as the king herb to nourish the Yin and Blood so as to invigorate the Liver and Kidney. Its Chinese therapeutic actions are to nourish Blood, Tonify Liver and Kidney Yin, Replenish Essence and Fill the Marrow. It also helps to arrest coughing and wheezing associated with Kidney Deficiency and the inability to pull Qi downward. Through its chemical composition, which includes catalpols, rehmanniosides, rehnmannans and mannitol, it has been shown in clinical studies and research to be helpful in hypertension, cardiovascular disease as well as ocular disease. It nourishes the Yin and generates body fluids to treat Yin and Blood Deficiencies. The dried, unprocessed form found in YGJ is mostly used to address heat in the Blood that injures the Fluids, Essence or Blood (Chen 2001). Rehmannia contains catalpols which have been shown to have a protective role in cerebral conditions and memory (Zhang 2009) (Zhu 2009). Its use in chronic renal disease as a tonic is widespread (Zhang 2008) explaining the supportive role it undertakes with the kidneys.



Glehnia, Ophiopogon, Angelica and Lycium act as minister herbs to help reinforce the king herb. The hematopoietic effects of Glehnia can help to explain the formula's use in cerebral disease, including behavioral issues (Zhao 2007), in addition to its antioxidant effects (Yuan 2002). It acts to Tonify the Liver and Kidney Yin in deficiency patterns. It Nourishes the Yin and clears the Lung.



Angelica (Dang Gui - pictured) is a sweet, acrid warm herb whose actions as a Blood Tonic are well researched. It is found in many herbal formulas used to treat Heart and Liver Blood Deficiencies. Its actions as a Blood mover are used to invigorate blood circulation as a form of pain relief, especially in *Bi Zheng* (painful obstruction) syndromes. It acts to moisten and unblock the bowels secondary to Blood Deficiency, as well as stopping coughs and dyspnoea through its content of essential oils and scopletin (Xian 1997). Angelica has been shown to treat

acetaminophen-induced hepatopathy due to promotion of hepatocyte generation (Zhong 1992).

Angelica sinensis has been shown to provide hematopoietic support in mice through protection of myelosuppression (Queiroz 2010) as well as its polysaccharide and antioxidant activity (Zhang 2010). Ophiopogon, through its composition of ophiopogonins, b-sitosterols and glucoside content, has been shown to be of benefit in coronary artery disease as well as overall health support for elderly patients (Chen 2001). The cytoprotective and antioxidant effects of Lycium extract support proper organ function, especially in the liver (Zhang 2010).

Conclusion

Behavioral problems are commonplace in small animal veterinary practice. They account for a significant proportion of euthanasias as well. In this case report, a dog was presented for fear aggression issues and was successfully treated with Chinese herbs when diagnosed from a TCVM pattern differentiation perspective.

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