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## TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE

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Alternative medicine encompasses many different disciplines. One of these, traditional Chinese medicine, is better known by its two components, acupuncture and herbal medicine. Both components arrive at a diagnosis that may sound quite different from what animal owners are used to. This article is intended to provide a basic understanding of how a diagnosis is made and why these therapies work.

The system of diagnosing used today was developed in China over 3500 years ago. Without today's technology, doctors had to rely on the symptoms that could be observed by touch, sight, hearing and smell to reach a diagnosis. While the western world developed a system of linear thinking (A causes B that with C causes D), Chinese medicine regards the overall pattern as more important. Because of this, the Chinese medicine diagnosis for two patients with the same western diagnosis may be different if their pattern of disease is different.

In order to define a pattern for a certain disease, many practitioners begin by classifying symptoms according to eight parameters. This method determines whether symptoms are seen on the exterior or interior, appear to be hot or cold, excessive or deficient, or are more yin or yang. The concept of yin and yang is central to Chinese thought. It states at its basic level, that everything seeks balance and has components that can be defined as yin (female, darkness, slow, heavy, inward) and yang (male, light, fast, weightless, outward). The natural order of things is said to be a balance of these qualities, each striving for dominance, but neither succeeding. When one predominates, disease occurs.

Acupuncture works by accessing the body's natural energy channels called meridians. At certain points, these channels run close to the skin and can be manipulated by inserting needles into specific points. This energy is called Qi (pronounced chee) and is responsible for keeping energy flowing and keeping the body in balance. Inserting acupuncture needles can support, restrict, or direct the flow of Qi, and depending upon the imbalance that is present, allowing the body to heal itself. Current medical research has shown the manipulation of acupuncture points can stimulate blood flow, induce the production of anti-inflammatory compounds, and even regulate hormone levels, which may explain why this therapy can work for a large number of problems.

Sometimes acupuncture does not seem to work as well as we would like. In these instances, herbal medicine is also recommended. In some respects, herbal medicine is similar to current prescription medicine. A problem is identified and a drug is prescribed. However, because Chinese medicine looks for the pattern rather than the disease, many times herbs are prescribed to deal with the underlying imbalance rather than the specific symptom. This can be an advantage in diseases where the cause may not be known. In cases where an animal has allergies to a certain medication, or harmful side effects to medication, herbal formulas present a useful alternative.

Veterinary medicine is all about making a cherished family member healthy. Alternative medicine provides another tool to achieve this goal. At Pilchuck Veterinary Hospital, Dr. Michael Salewski is trained in veterinary acupuncture, herbal medicine and chiropractic, which he uses to treat all types of disease.