

BOOK AND VIDEO REVIEWS

The Treatment of Cattle by Homoeopathy by George MacLeod. C W Daniel (1992): Saffron Walden. 148 Pp. Price £8.95. ISBN 0 85207 247 3

Veterinary medicine by its very nature is always a subject for diverse views and argument. However in recent times few issues have been more controversial both inside and outside the veterinary profession than that of homoeopathy. This is perhaps typified by the acrimonious debate of the Council of the British Veterinary Association (BVA) in December 1990 which resulted in the British Association of Homoeopathic Veterinary Surgeons not being granted divisional status of the BVA by a large majority and the subsequent lengthy, and at times somewhat bitter, correspondence in the *Veterinary Record*. There appear to be two main problems, firstly whether or not homoeopathy should be used by the veterinary profession at all, and secondly whether homoeopathic medicines for veterinary purposes should be licensed, ie assessed for efficacy and safety.

It is the reviewer's opinion that, while not undertaking homoeopathy himself, it is just as wrong to totally condemn out-of-hand homoeopathic veterinary medicine as it is for some of the protagonists to equally condemn conventional medicine. It does seem that in the right hands, and under the correct conditions, satisfactory results can be obtained at times with either method of therapy. It is surely in the best interests of those practitioners who prescribe these products, as well as for the animals to which they are administered, that there is some form of control and licensing procedure for such medicines.

It is against this background that this book by George MacLeod is reviewed. It is perhaps fair to describe George MacLeod as the 'father' of contemporary veterinary homoeopathy. Now past the normal state retirement age, he has practised the discipline for most of his professional life in all the major species encountered by the veterinary surgeon. He has found homoeopathy in his own hands to have worked and has been able to pursue his profession by this means alone.

The book itself is a reprint and was first published in 1981. It is perhaps a pity that a new edition has not been produced to take into account some of the controversies surrounding the subject. The book appears to be primarily aimed at the farmer. This perhaps provides the first criticism as regards use of the book and the theory of homoeopathy. It is in the reviewer's limited understanding that with homoeopathy one treats 'like with like', ie the remedy chosen should as near as possible produce in a healthy animal the same type of signs shown by the animal being treated. Thus the remedy is used to treat the whole animal and this takes into account its temperament, environment etc. In many cases to be done properly considerable knowledge is required of dosing regimes. It is therefore unfortunate that no account is given in this book of the philosophy behind homoeopathy.

The author describes the types of preparation and how to administer them; he discusses the treatment and prevention of some common conditions and lists a *materia medica*. It would seem that some common conditions such as parasitic gastroenteritis are omitted whereas others such as bracken poisoning or sweet clover poisoning, which are most unusual, merit chapters — albeit of only one page. It would seem likely that in many cases farmers will have trouble trying to determine the cause of their animals' problems from the conditions mentioned, eg congestion of the lungs, oedema of the lungs, haemorrhage of the lungs, pneumonia, pulmonary abscess, pleurisy and pulmonary emphysema. This may well lead to the farmer trying to produce a 'best fit' for the signs presented and those described in the book. In many cases this could lead to the incorrect treatment being administered. Mind you this is but part of a wider problem and not necessarily confined to homoeopathic remedies. Homoeopathic medicines are at present obtainable without any restrictions on their sale. The remedies themselves are often relatively cheap. In the wrong hands this book may well encourage their usage from the wrong point of motivation by perhaps encouraging the owner to avoid the cost of veterinary advice by treating the animals himself.

However, if unsuccessful, this will often lead to problems. Firstly and most importantly the correct treatment of the animals may have been delayed thereby resulting in unnecessary suffering for the animal, its possible death and the risk of further spread of disease within the herd. Secondly it may place the remedy which had been tried into disrepute and thirdly the farmer will have to decide what to do. If he decides to press on himself with further treatment there is every possibility that this will further compound the animal's welfare problem. If he calls in his veterinary surgeon he has to then decide whether to confess to treating the animal himself — if he does it may sometimes lead to a decline in the practitioner-client relationship which is so very important for the health and well-being of animals.

It is recommended that any farmer wishing to employ homoeopathy makes his veterinary practitioner aware of the situation before he starts. If he does so it will help should treatment not be successful. The response he will receive from his veterinary surgeon will be very variable but in some instances it will not be as negative as might be anticipated.

It is to be hoped that before he finally 'retires' George MacLeod will update this book and include some chapters which encompass the present sensitivities and discussions taking place within the veterinary profession and elsewhere over the use and possible misuse of homoeopathic remedies.

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