

# A Matter of Choice

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**P**lease don't harbour and justify "quacks", this was the voice of Veterinarians in unison, which was loud and clear at the Taj residency seminar hall on 6th Feb. 99, on the occasion of an International Seminar on "Integrated approach for Animal Health Care, organised by Milma, MRCMPU, Calicut.

The theme of the seminar was aptly selected by the organizers, but I had my own reservations. Going by the objectives of this well planned seminar, I would have preferred an "Integration of Alternative Systems of Medicine for animal health care", which would be more explanatory than the one selected - this is strictly my personal opinion.

As was evident from the day one, the outcome of this seminar has far fetched importance and credentials as far the animal husbandry sector and vets of Kerala are concerned.

This seminar was attended by various consultants and experts from abroad like. Dr. Denis Fielding, Professor University of Edinburgh, Dr. Evely Mathias, Consultant, Germany, Dr. marina martin, Project co-ordinator, Scotland and some of our own stalwarts, to name a few Dr. V.A. Sapre, Dr. P.K. Sanyal, Dr. P.A. Deore and Dr. Viswanatha Reddy V.M.

As a Vet I was very much interested to learn more about the objective of this seminar, coz., In fact, I'm not authorized legally to prescribe an Ayurvedic or a Homeo preparation. But, manytimes we do over ride this legal issue to satisfy our moral ethics" To relieve the suffering animals from pain and disease".

The information and knowledge, which the Vets of India, in particular the Vets of Kerala gather on Ayurveda or Homeo is from a variety of media but basically through the following sources.

1. Representatives of various pharmaceutical companies manufacturing Ayurvedic drug and to a lesser extent from Ayurvedic pharmacists.

2. Integration with fellow vets, having experience in treating animals with Ayurvedic or Hoemo drugs, who may not necessarily be an expert.

3. Information gathered through handbook and easy to use manuals, written by Ayurvedic/ Homeo Physician, for the use and reference by the layman.

These kinds of handbooks give concise information about the drug but a very confusing picture about its use and action with no word about its contraindication. Needless it's always argued that they are free from side effects which is definitely a false notion amongst us.

4. Recently, veterinarians have adopted a new approach to get an instant information about the alternative system of medicine, which requires less effort and is economically feasible as one doesn't have to spend one's hard earned money to purchase books. This technique is carried out by organising a one day or a half day seminar more often, concurrently with the monthly meeting.

The invited delegate may be an Ayurvedic or Homeo Physician dealing with human beings. He delivers his notes with utmost confidence, under the impression that the animals rarely suffer from acute, life threatening diseases and with no idea about any epidemic and endemic diseases.

The term ethnoveterinary is not new to Kerala. It can also be defined as an 'Ottamooli Chikitsa' in Malayalam : Obviously the situation in Kerala is fairly different from that of Andhra or Mozambique. In Kerala, we have cross-bred cattle, in majority with high yield. We used to take pride in saying that the owners are literate, can differentiate between different systems of medicine, they are wise in not accepting, a one shot dose of advice from quacks to risk their source of livelihood and in a situation, where the services of a qualified veterinarian is available in every Panchayat. EVM has a reasonable application in some conditions, but their importance should not be blown out of proportion.

The utility of EVM as a profession is quite

out of tune for a state like Kerala. I would hazard a guess that EVM has little scope as a system either in the immediate future or in the distant in this state.

The concept of EVM is projected more or less like a "Change" by certain quarters. We would like to take a strong stand against this change. The vets resisted this concept, as this change was directed backwards, leading us to the 50's and 60's. The change should be directed forwards to meet the challenges of food and Nutrition in the next millennium for our ever expanding population.

Another pertinent topic which came up for discussion during the seminar was regarding, "the integration of Alternative system of medicine" for animal health. The concept was viewed optimistically as we cannot deny the fact that we veterinarians are freely practising this system and our departmental supply of medicine stands testimony to this fact. The Ayurveda/Homeo drugs are standardised and validated. Moreover this system in human aspect is practiced by physicians with professional degrees in respective systems.

It was amazing to hear from the visiting consultants from abroad that there are no colleges or universities in the world, forget about India, which award a full fledged degree/diploma in Veterinary Homeo or Veterinary Ayurveda.

As a matter of fact, many of us switch to the alternative system of medicine, when the conventional treatment has failed and been found ineffective, but many a times the ASM is used in conglomeration with traditional system.

This very approach of "hitting in dark" reflects our lack of confidence in the alternative system, justifying our ignorance aroused due to lack of training and authentic information supplemented with a "fear" of using ASM.

Perched on the edge of the millennium, we are at a vantage point. The aspect of legalising the practice of ASM in veterinary is definitely an expected diversification, but it was

perceived with mixed feeling engulfed in uncertainty.

The topic was put in for lot of brainstorming, and discussion. Various ideas and suggestions generated were pooled. At last, it was conclusively decided that under the present circumstances, it was the veterinarians engaged in conventional treatment were in a better stand to practice ASM in the light of their knowledge about physiology and anatomy of different species and breeds of animals supplemented with knowledge of various endemic, epidemic, acute, life threatening diseases, of bacterial, fungal, and viral origin.

The vets have definitely an edge over others in deciding the best line of treatment based on urgency, need and economic viability.

The end result gives us an illusion of perfection. Armed with confusing information, the vets start bombarding his prescription with Ayurvedic, Homeo, Unani and... what not! All along the process we slowly convert ourselves to mixopaths, unconsciously, the real identity lost along the way.

This international seminar on "Integrated Approach for Animals Health Care" exposed and encouraged the application of alternative medicine in animal health. Ofcourse, with some limitations, hence "Legalising the illegal" but it does prevent further exposing ourselves into the world of ignorance.

One very interesting experience, which we had during this seminar was the emergence of ethnoveterinary practice into the area of Animal Health. Ethnoveterinary is a branch of science, which exclusively deals with the application of traditional knowledge, which are locally available and cheap, which come through "word of mouth" passed on from one generation to another. This knowledge is raw, subjective and may be based on traditional values, beliefs, may be medico-religious and most often bordering on superstition.

There is no scientific explanation,

standardisation or validation of these practices. It varies from region to region, community to community, country to country, and any one is free to practice this system at his own risk/advantage. The basic differences between an ethnoveterinary (EVP) practice and an Alternative System of Medicine (ASM) are:

1. The ASM is practised by qualified physicians in the human health side. In the case of veterinary, there is no legalised degree in homeo/ayurveda. EVP is practiced by Traditional Physician or layman, there being no need for any formal or technical education

2. The drugs of ASM are standardised, validated with concrete written information - EVP emerges through word of mouth, through rejection and selection method.

As I had the opportunity of listening to all the papers presented at this seminar on Ethno Veterinary Practice (EVP), I could draw a conclusion that the EVP is still at its infancy and more towards its embryonic stage.

The EVP is mainly encouraged in countries of eastern Africa - namely Tanzania, Mozambique. These areas are economically and socially much backward with civilization still to touch the lifestyle of its inhabitants.

The domesticated animals are of local breed, the milk production of cattles are not even sufficient to its own calf. The service of a veterinarian is more or less unimaginable.

Recently, in response to the request made by these countries, some non governmental (NGO) organisations like Vet Aid of UK have opened some projects in these areas to educate the locals about scientific rearing of animals by suitably applying the EVP. VetAid is also engaged in providing 2 to 3 week training to the locals to identify and treat diseases with traditional drugs, as the service of veterinarian is close to impossible.

Lately, the same EVP is encouraged in India, particularly in some remote areas of Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra, incidentally the economic and social conditions of these areas are not much different from those of Tanzania/Mozambique. EVP is utilized and encouraged by an NGO named "ATHIRA"

with its head office at Pune..

Vets are the best in undertaking differential diagnosis, which makes them the right person to exploit the potential of ASM.

But definitely not with their present knowledge about the ASM. It's all easily said than done. The interested veterinarian should apply to the Veterinary Council of India. The V.C (Veterinary Council) will then direct the interested veterinarian to undergo a short term course of his desired branch of ASM. Often the VCI recommends, the institution offering this type of short term training.

In nut shell, this course, not only validates and legalises a veterinarian to practice ASM, but also encourages the veterinarian who is now armed with an additional specialisation, to have a holistic approach for adopting the best line of treatment for animal health care, as now he can recognise the complementarity of the different alternatives and can pick the best to create the most appropriate combination of all medicine types.

Last but not the least, it was a very good effort by the organisers to conduct an international seminar on the much needed issue, with excellence. It didn't have any senseless arguments, was complemented with tough and serious talks, all of which proclaim a paradigm shift, thus recapitulating the words of our oath-

"I accept as life long obligation, to the continual improvement of my professional knowledge and competence".

