



Complementary and Alternative Therapy Guidelines

PREAMBLE

The *Veterinary Practice Act 2021 (Act)* makes no reference to complementary and alternative therapies in the provision of veterinary services. However professional standards must be applied in the delivery of all veterinary services and the responsibility for setting those standards rests with the Veterinary Practice Board (Board).

These Guidelines describe the standard of practice expected by the Board to be observed by veterinarians in Western Australia when providing complementary or alternative therapies.

APPLICATION

These Guidelines apply from and including 8 August 2023.

These Guidelines may be superseded by subsequent versions. To ascertain whether this version has been superseded, view the current version on the Board's website at www.vpbwa.org.au

It is the responsibility of veterinarians who utilise alternative or complementary therapies, to be conversant with the current version of these Guidelines.

DEFINITIONS

Complementary and alternative therapies are a diverse group of practices and products not considered part of conventional (mainstream) veterinary medicine. These therapies do not have a significant weight of scientific proof of their safety and efficacy. In some instances, their use is contradictory to scientific evidence.

¹**Complementary therapies** are used together with conventional medicine.

Alternative therapies are used instead of conventional medicine, although they are sometimes used at the same time as, but not in deliberate concert with, conventional medicine.

Integrative medicine is a term used to refer to treatments that combine conventional medicine with those complementary therapies for which there is some evidence of safety and effectiveness.

Acupuncture, aromatherapy, chiropractic medicine, herbalism, homeopathy, naturopathy, osteopathy and various massage therapies are examples of complementary and alternative therapies. It should be noted that these therapies are only cited as examples as it is not possible for the Board to list all the various therapies. Depending on the circumstances under which a particular treatment modality is used, it may be regarded as either complementary or alternative therapy.

¹British Veterinary Association <https://www.bva.co.uk/take-action/our-policies/complementary-medicine/>, July 2018

GUIDELINES

1. A diagnosis should be based on sound, accepted principles of veterinary medicine.
2. Veterinarians contemplating prescribing, supplying or administering complementary or alternative therapies are required to base their professional decisions on current scientific knowledge, practice and standards and must ensure the welfare of the animal is paramount while taking into account the availability of conventional medications.
3. Any treatment or procedure should be complementary to conventional medicine and not offered as an alternative. It should not delay or prevent the use of conventional medicine or procedures;
4. Care must be taken to ensure that the treatment or procedure is safe and does not interfere negatively with conventional treatments or procedures;
5. Sufficient information must be provided to enable a reasonable client, in that client's circumstances, to make an informed decision about whether to proceed. The veterinarian must explain:
 - a. that the treatment is complementary or alternative in nature;
 - b. whether or not conventional treatment is available to treat the presenting condition; and
 - c. the comparable risks, side effects, benefits and costs of the complementary or alternative therapies compared with conventional therapies.
6. A signed consent document from the owner does not exempt the veterinarian from their professional responsibility to ensure the safety and welfare of the animal, nor their obligations to that animal's owner.
7. In the event that the Board investigates a complaint regarding an adverse outcome following the treatment of an animal with complementary or alternative therapies, the veterinarian may be required to demonstrate why an animal did not receive conventional medications and/or treatment regimens with scientifically supported efficacy and safety records if they were available.

DISCLAIMER

These Guidelines (printed, electronic or any other medium) do not constitute legal advice.

Readers are encouraged to seek their own professional advice to determine their obligations under the Act, subsidiary legislation made under the Act and other applicable laws. It is the responsibility of those persons regulated by the Act to determine their obligations. The authors, the Veterinary Practice Board of Western Australia (**Board**), the members of the Board and the staff of the Board accept no liability for losses caused by reliance on any of the material in these Guidelines.