

Pooches feel relief in a pinch Veterinary hospital treats pets with

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SAN RAMON -- Marlo James didnt know what to do.

Her beloved basset hound, Star -- a regular at the Martinez Animal Shelter until James took the beleaguered animal into her Danville home -- was suffering violent seizures.

She would have them in clusters, like every hour to two hours, James said.

Marlo and her husband, Greg, tried everything to help ease the dogs epilepsy: repeated visits to the Bishop Ranch Veterinary Hospital, even late at night , and steadily increasing doses of drugs such as potassium bromide and phenobarbital.

After five months of treatment -- not to mention thousands of dollars in medical bills -- the Jameses were willing to try anything. So, they turned to acupuncture.

Low and behold, Stars condition improved and her seizures subsided.

The difference has been night and day, said Marlo, adding that her Shining Star looks forward to going to her weekly acupuncture appointments and has been much more animated in general.

Bishop Ranch Veterinary Hospital is one of the few hospitals in Northern California with specialists who practice acupuncture and homeopathic medicine, one of a variety of unique programs the hospital offers.

Dr. Kirsten Williams, an Oaklandnative who specializes in the alternative treatment style, said acupuncture is based on the Chinese medicine approach that an animals energy can be out of balance and that needles applied to certain points helps counterbalance that.

In Stars case, we place some of needles on anti-seizure points on her head, on her spine and other spots on the body, she said. The idea is to reach the different bundles of nerves and stimulate the nervous system directly.

The basset hound goes weekly for acupuncture sessions of about 15 to 20 minutes, with the intention of coming out without pain.

If I would have known it would have worked and that we wouldn't have had to go through these five months of hell, we would have done it earlier, James said. Our goal is to completely wean her off the drugs.

Acupuncture can be used for ailments like arthritis, kidney and liver problems, relief for cancer, digestive problems and allergies, Williams said.

Not every dog responds as well as Star, she said. Some dogs respond like she does, but others take a lot longer, sometimes several months before showing improvement.

Holistic medicine and conventional medicine complement each other very well, said Williams, who has worked at the San Ramon veterinary for 13 years. She also works at Creature Comfort Holistic Veterinary Center in Oakland.

In a way, it's the best of both worlds, she said.

Bishop Ranch Veterinary Center employs 13 veterinarians with different interests and fields of animal expertise at its 14,000-square-foot facility. The center also has an emergency and urgent care facility on site and 24-hour patient care, which is unusual for a general practice facility.

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