Marijuana and Marijuana-derived Products in Companion Animals

Introduction
The CVMA Task Force on Pharmaceutical Issues took on the controversial topic of marijuana and marijuana-derived products being used in companion animals. Although not currently considered pharmaceutical agents per se, there is clearly a lot of interest in the role that marijuana and marijuana-derived products may have in veterinary healthcare. At least, there seems to be quite a bit of interest by consumers purchasing and companies selling CBD (hemp-derived products) with numerous health claims.

The Task Force took a cautious approach to this issue for several reasons:

1. Lack of rigorous clinical trials validating the health effects of any marijuana product in companion animals
2. Concerns over marijuana toxicity in companion animals which have been previously reported
3. Federal designation of marijuana by the Drug Enforcement Agency as a Class I Scheduled Drug (no medical use)

Nevertheless, the Task Force believes it is important to provide CVMA members with some guidance as they talk to clients about marijuana and marijuana-derived products for use in their companion animals. Anecdotal evidence strongly suggests that our clients are moving in this direction already, and it is important for veterinarians to have an understanding of what we know and what we don’t know about the health effects of these products in our patients.

We know from a recent survey of consumers purchasing hemp products online for their dogs that seizures, cancer, anxiety, and arthritis were the main reasons for their purchases. Do these products work for these conditions and, if so, what is the optimal dose? We don’t have the data to answer those questions and yet our clients are conducting their own individual clinical trials. Thus, it is important for veterinarians to be engaged in the conversations even though we cannot prescribe marijuana or marijuana-derived products. What about marijuana products that contain THC (as opposed to the hemp products)? We certainly have clients that come to our hospital who believe THC helps to manage their dog’s chronic conditions and this is probably occurring across the state.

As veterinarians we pride ourselves on being a science-based profession with solid evidence behind our treatment recommendations. Whether we like it or not, our clients are not waiting for the scientific studies to be completed before trying products that they believe will make their dogs, cats, and other companion animals more comfortable. Veterinary medicine is not alone in this new era of experimentation with the health effects of marijuana and marijuana-derived products. The National Academies of Science just released a comprehensive review of the literature on the health effects of marijuana in people: “The Health Effects of Cannabis and Cannabinoids: The Current State of Evidence and Recommendations for Research” (http://www.nap.edu/24625). Through an extensive review of the literature, the NAS committee came up with 100 different recommendations for more research, highlighting that we are still in early phases of understanding what the therapeutic effects of marijuana and marijuana-derived products may or may not be. With this perspective, the Task Force encourages open and honest conversations between the veterinarian and client on the potential risks and as-yet-to-be proven benefits of these compounds.

Reference

See page 9 for CVMA’s Position Statement on Marijuana and Marijuana-derived Products in Companion Animals.