

August 16, 2007

Prepared by Laura H. Kahn, MD, MPH, MPP - Bruce Kaplan, DVM - Thomas P. Monath, MD

“ONE HEALTH” ... in Action! [#7]

One Health Concept: The Human-Animal Bond as a Collaborative Model

By William F. McCulloch, DVM, MPH

There has been a maturation of our knowledge about the human health implications of human-animal relationships in the United States during the past 50 years. From media comments that it is just a “passing fad” in the 70’s, the field has progressed to a legitimate area of serious health care research, policy and application in the 1990’s to this date.

The bond involves both people and animals. It is an interdisciplinary field requiring cooperation of health and helping professions to succeed. Veterinarians who have been in small animal practice have known for years that pets contribute to human mental health and well-being. This paper is one person’s view of those elements most familiar to me and not a complete review of the literature.

Early on, except for a number of anecdotal articles, there was little in the literature on animal-assisted therapy as a field for collaborative studies supporting the “One Health” concept. The person considered one of the pioneers in the U.S. is my late colleague, Boris Levinson, PhD, a child psychologist who published about pet-facilitated child psychotherapy and the role of the veterinarian in mental health in the 1960’s. These articles piqued my late psychiatrist brother, Michael J. McCulloch, MD, who was a medical student at the University of Iowa where I was on the faculty of the medical school. I encouraged him to be a beacon of the medical profession and pursue this area. He did until his untimely death at age 41, when a deranged former patient murdered him in his office in 1985. He was the first president of the Delta Foundation, founded in 1977 and then became the Delta Society in 1981 with another pioneer, Leo K. Bustad, DVM, PhD as president and Michael J. McCulloch, MD, as vice-president. Incidentally, Dr. Bustad earned his PhD in physiology in 1960 from the University of Washington, School of Medicine, where earlier he completed a postdoctoral fellowship from the National Science Foundation.

Other veterinarians who were major players were, R. K. Anderson, DVM, MPH, Stanley L. Diesch, DVM, MPH and William F. McCulloch, DVM, MPH. Linda Hines, MA was our outstanding Delta Society President/CEO for 20 years. Our new President/CEO is Lawrence J. Norvell, an outstanding leader and supporter of teamwork on exploring the benefits of the human-animal bond.

The mission of the Delta Society is to improve human health through service and therapy animals with Pet Partners involved in animal-assisted therapy and activities in health care facilities in all 50 United States and five countries. During the 1980’s the Delta society created the refereed journal, ANTHROOS, for publications of scientific articles on human-animal relationships with Andrew N. Rowan, PhD as its editor.

During the early 1970's, Michael J. McCulloch, MD, began lecturing to veterinarians and veterinary medical students at the University of Missouri with the aid of C. Richard Dorn, DVM, MPH and D.C. Blenden, DVM, MS and the author of this piece. The media was somewhat skeptical of this "new" area of endeavor, with news article headlines such as, "Psychiatrist Goes to the Dogs".

A national symposium was convened on "Implications of History and Ethics to Medicine—Veterinary and Human" at Texas A & M University in 1976 between the medical and veterinary medical professions. Psychiatrist Michael J. McCulloch, MD gave a landmark paper entitled, "The Veterinarian and Human Health-Care Systems: Issues and Boundaries". Dr. McCulloch also promoted the need for interdisciplinary research and more involvement by the medical profession by his efforts with the American Psychiatric Association in the early 1980's.

In 1975, R. K. Anderson, DVM, MPH and Leonard M. Schuman, MD at the University of Minnesota, received a federal grant to do a national study on the human health activities of the veterinary medical profession. Michael J. McCulloch, MD was a member of the national advisory committee. He wrote the chapter on one of the final nine human health goals that supported the now coined, "One Health" (formerly "One Medicine") concept, i.e., "Mental and Emotional Health" role of the veterinarian with other health professionals.

It was during these meetings on this study that the concept of the Delta Foundation had its beginning with Drs. R. K. Anderson, Stanley L. Diesch, Joseph Quigley, Michael J. McCulloch and William F. McCulloch. A film, "Three is Company, Not a Crowd" was made with Dr. Michael J. McCulloch as a joint effort of the University of Minnesota and the Texas A & M University Institute of Comparative Medicine that the author directed.

To show the interdisciplinary model, I am highlighting some of the early Delta Board members and consultants with their primary professional degrees: *Michael J. McCulloch, MD, Leo K. Bustad, DVM, R. K. Anderson, DVM, William F. McCulloch, DVM, Stanley L. Diesch, DVM, Aaron H. Katcher, MD, James Knight, MD, George Saslow, PhD, MD, Suzanne Robb, RN, PhD, Alan Beck, DSc., Susan Cohen, MSW, PhD, Al Hopkins, DVM, Earl Strimple, DVM, John New, DVM, Marvin Samuelson, DVM, James Harris, DVM, Lynn C. Anderson, DVM, Linda Hines, MA and Sophie Engelhard Craighead, MA.*

Some of the early interdisciplinary centers established to promote and study the human-animal bond included the People-Pet-Partnership at Washington State University, the Center for Study of Human-Animal Relationships and Environments (CENSHARE) at the University of Minnesota and the Interaction of Animals in Society Center at the University of Pennsylvania. Numerous other centers developed in the 1980's, with most associated with medical, veterinary medical and nursing schools and schools of public health. Research papers are now in the thousands, but more needs to be done to bring the potential for the human-animal bond to further the healing power of our companion animals (pets). ***Some examples of medical and social benefits include: reduced blood pressure, enhanced healing and recovery, improved speech and detection of seizures in some children, and improved motivation, exercise, and less anxiety for seniors.*** (Please see published studies of benefits to human health at www.deltasociety.org).

Some Comments and Recommendations for the Future of the Human-Animal Bond and using the “One Health” concept to further advance human and animal health studies, policy and practice in clinical and community settings:

1. There is a continuing scarcity of funds for studies on the human health benefits of our companion animals. New clinical studies with appropriate experimental design and controls are needed. Studies need to show both immediate and long term benefits. If this is accomplished, it is conceivable that animal-assisted therapy will become medical policy for third party pay in insurance. Currently most of the efforts of animal-assisted therapy depend on volunteers as are in the Delta Society’s Pet Partner program.
2. There are some wonderful signs about the importance of the Masters Degree in Public Health for health care professionals’ graduate training. ***My MPH studies at the University of Minnesota School of Public Health taught me the importance of teamwork in healthcare and research with two glowing examples being Gaylord W. Anderson, MD, MPH and R. K. Anderson, DVM, MPH.*** There are now examples of joint DVM/MPH degree programs in the United States at the University of Minnesota/School of Veterinary Medicine, Iowa State University/University of Iowa College of Veterinary Medicine, Tufts University School of Medicine (the first to establish an MD/MPH program), University of Georgia/College of Veterinary Medicine, University of Wisconsin-Madison/School of Veterinary Medicine, and the University of Florida/College of Veterinary Medicine.
3. One of the main voices for promoting the healing power of pets in recent years is Marty Becker, DVM, who has appeared regularly on TV programs and with writings such as his book on *The Healing Power of Pets* and a Co-author of *Chicken Soup for the Pet Lover’s Soul*. He is a member of Delta Society’s Honorary Board.
4. ***This is where the medical profession needs a new champion.*** Michael J. McCulloch, MD, from the 1970’s until his death in 1985, was a steady but sometimes solitary voice educating practitioners in human medicine about the value of human-animal interactions, especially those in his specialty of psychiatry.

Summary Quote from Michael J. McCulloch, MD, 1981:

“In an age of research when it is tempting to reduce emotions to biochemical reactions and to rely heavily on the technology of medicine, it is refreshing to find that a person’s health and well-being may be improved by prescribing contact with other living things. Members of the health and allied professions must continue to combine resources, work together in the spirit of cooperation, and never forget to “cure when possible but comfort always.”

The “One Health” concept and efforts to support it among the allied health professions will help accomplish Dr. Michael J. McCulloch’s poignant vision.