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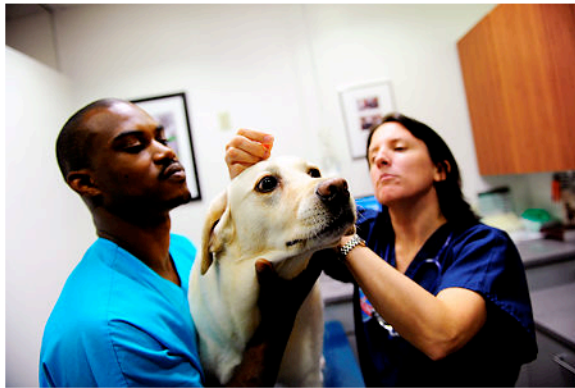
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Prickly therapy for pooches

BY OWEN MORITZ
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Friday, August 15th 2008, 12:37 AM



Appleton/News

Hopper, called a "wimp" by her owner, doesn't flinch Thursday as a needle is inserted by Dr. Bridget Halligan, aided by Justin Ferguson at West Chelsea Veterinary.

Hopper is a dog on the verge of a nervous breakdown - so her owner is turning to ancient Chinese medicine to help.

Yes. Acupuncture for dogs.

Hopper, a lovable angst-ridden Labrador Retriever, stood amazingly calm as Dr. Bridget Halligan slipped tiny red needles into 11 points from the tip of his head to her hind legs.



Appleton/News

The goal was to calm her down - and it was especially needed since it was nail-clipping day for her inside the West Chelsea Veterinary on W. 26th St.

Hopper hates her nails cut.

"She's a wimp," laughed owner Liz Luboja, who remained in the room. "A wush.

"If someone was being mugged on the street, Hopper would probably get behind me for protection."

But on this day, the yellow Lab sat stoic and brave as technician-in-training Justin Ferguson held her for the required 15 minutes.

Then it was time for Halligan, a certified veterinary acupuncturist, to remove the pins.

"Good dog," the vet said as Luboja rewarded her pet with a few treats.

Then a happy Hopper hopped out the door.

Halligan, 42, daughter of a New York orthopedist who has his own acupuncture practice - for people - is among a new breed of vets who have expanded their therapy options for pets.

She became a certified acupuncturist 10 years ago and now treats five to 10 pets a day.

She finds pit bulls easier to handle than Chihuahuas - "the little ones can get wiggly" - and dogs easier than cats.

It's also true that her clients tend to be bigger and older dogs who usually have arthritis, for which acupuncture can also be used as relief.

"The bigger ones put more pressure on their legs," she said.

In acupuncture therapy, tiny needles are inserted into certain points of a pet's body to cause the release of endogenous opioids, the body's natural pain-killers and mood fixers, and smaller amounts of cortisol, the body's own natural anti-inflammatory substance.

The International Veterinary Acupuncture Society says the practice is gaining wide acceptance.

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