



NOT ALL PATIENTS HAVE MEDICAL CONDITIONS

UC Davis Treats Behavior Issues

■ Rob Warren, UC Davis VMTH Communications & Marketing Officer

When Minnie, an 8-year-old female shepherd/foxhound mix, presented to the Behavior Service at the UC Davis Veterinary Medical Teaching Hospital, her fearful response to noises and unfamiliar surroundings was so severe she refused to get out of the car. UC Davis veterinarians had to perform their initial examination of her in the parking lot.

Since there was nothing physically wrong with Minnie, why was she visiting a veterinary hospital? Since all pet owners want a healthy, happy pet, “behavior medicine” has become quite popular. Behavior issues can cause just as much damage mentally to a dog as an injury can cause physically to them.

Currently, there are 66 Diplomates of the American College of Veterinary Behaviorists, practicing in the United States (56), Canada (6), Australia (2), the United Kingdom (1) and Japan (1).

Some might think changing a dog’s behavior is a job for trainers, not veterinarians. Other conditions might be causing the odd behavior, though, that only a veterinarian can diagnose.

“An advantage of taking an animal to a veterinary behaviorist rather than a trainer is that trainers cannot determine if there is a physical or medical reason for the animal’s behavior,” said Dr. Liz Stelow, DVM, DACVB, of the UC Davis Behavior Service. “We also are legally required to keep up with the latest in behavior research and attend continuing education seminars, which trainers do not have to do.”

Dr. Stelow recently became a board-certified behaviorist following a residency in the specialty at the VMTH. Behavior is one of 34 specialty disciplines that residents can pursue at UC Davis, which has the largest residency training program of any veterinary teaching hospital.

UC Davis’ Behavior Service includes two board-certified specialists, a board-certified Distinguished Professor Emeritus (who still contributes to the service) and a resident, making it the nation’s largest veterinary behavior program. Client visits to the service grew more than 10 percent over the past year, and UC Davis is making strides to increase visits even more.



Last year, the service hosted a popular Dog Bite Prevention Seminar (available on-line and in-person), and the limited number of on-line spots filled up within just a few days of the announcement. On February 28, 2015, the service will host an all-day Behavior Symposium, with eight hours of continuing education available either in-person at UC Davis or via webinar. To find out more information on the event and register, please see: http://www.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/ce/small_animal/behavior_symposium.cfm.

As for Minnie, UC Davis behaviorists were able to successfully help her overcome her fears. She was selected as the VMTH’s “Case of the Month” for August 2014. The full story on her journey back to being a healthy, happy dog can be read here: <http://www.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/whatsnew/article.cfm?id=2953>. **P**