

Homeopathy & Housing ALTERNATIVE VETERINARY MEDICINE CENTRE

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Homeopathy & Housing

Winter approaches and the evenings are drawing in. The air is becoming more and more humid and thoughts have to turn to the prospect of winter housing again. To the dairy farmer, this means that cows have to come in, whether into straw yards, kennels or cubicles. Calves, so well adapted to being out in the fresh air, will also be penned or grouped in housing situations. The problems that this change is most likely to bring us in greater proportion are mastitis in the dairy cows and respiratory problems or pneumonia in the young calves.

Mastitis is, as every reader will know, a vast subject and is manifested in a variety of ways. It is constructive, for the vast proportion of cases, to look at mastitis from the point of view of causality. The major sources of infection are cow-to-cow spread, via milk overflow in the cubicle or via the milking machine and environmental mastitis or that which is picked up from the micro-organisms which abound in the cow's environment, necessarily rendered more numerous and more powerful in the concentrated context of housing. The bacteria we normally associate with cow-to-cow spread are *Staphylococci* (those bacteria most commonly associated with chronic mastitis and high cell counts) and *Streptococcus agalactiae*. The most common environmental organisms involved are *Streptococcus uberis* and *Escherichia coli*, the latter being one of the organisms associated with acute, post-calving toxæmic mastitis.

Antibiotics, as an integral part of the '**5-point plan**', have played a part in mastitis control but it still proves very difficult, without heavy culling programmes in badly affected herds, to control chronic mastitis, leading to high cell counts. Furthermore, the positive effect of antibiotics on acute toxæmic mastitis is negligible and there are proponents who argue that dry cow therapy, with antibiotics can even render that particular form of mastitis more prevalent.

Homeopathy has a very useful part to play in mastitis control, particularly in herds which adopt a full holistic approach to disease management and treatment. Dairy farmers are reaping benefits of the homeopathic method of control and prevention,

using *Nosodes* against the common bacterial agents associated with mastitis (a [nosode](#) is a homeopathic medicine prepared from disease material and diluted to the usual extreme level common with homeopathic remedies). A nosode (e.g. AVMC's '*Mixed Mastitis Nosode*') can be administered to the cows via their drinking water, making whole-herd treatments very cheap and simple. The nosode method has been compared with vaccination and that can be a useful way of understanding its action in boosting cow resistance to specific bacterial invasion. It works within the body in an entirely different way, however, from vaccination.

Those herds which reap the greatest benefit from this method are those which also realise that the factors which reduce a cow's resistance to bacterial invasion must be reduced as much as possible*. When there is a particular problem with Staphylococcal mastitis, it is useful to consider splitting the herd to milk high cell count offenders separately or to have an extra cluster and unit reserved for such cows, in order to milk them separately as they come through the parlour.

Dry cow therapy with antibiotics is not necessarily a vital part of mastitis control in herds which use homeopathy, provided that the farm adapts its methods to the non-antibiotic approach. Such traditional measures as gradual drying-off (for example) may need to be revisited.

As regards homeopathic treatment of individual mastitis cases, this too is a very different approach. Notice must be taken of the cow's demeanour, build and behaviour in addition to the particular mastitis symptoms shown and other concomitant symptoms (e.g. diarrhoea or cough). This is the holistic (mind and body) concept of treatment and those who develop the art of incorporating this technique fully gain the most benefit from homeopathic methods of treatment. Such remedies as *Aconitum*, in very acute cases, where there is a congested udder and sudden fever, which may have been brought on by chilling; *Bryonia*, to help a cow which is unwilling to move when in pain from a swollen quarter; *Phytolacca*, when there are clots in the milk and hard lumps in the udder; *Pulsatilla*, where the milk may contain mucoid or purulent clots and the cow would be seeking solace and perhaps moaning; *Belladonna*, if there is sudden onset high fever, much pain and perhaps some anger; will prove to be invaluable treatments in the appropriate context.

The above brief 'sketches' of remedy-pictures serve to illustrate the homeopathic emphasis on the patient rather than upon the supposed infective organism. More detailed knowledge of the patient and the remedies would be required for proper homeopathic prescribing for individual cases.

In order to illustrate the possible advantages of homeopathic preventive methods, it is perhaps best to record some data from herds which have been through the process ([research](#)).

Calf Pneumonia brings another great worry to the dairy unit in the winter and another cause for antibiotic usage, sometimes on a massive scale. The possibilities of lack of proper ventilation, lack of a comfortable 'nest' for very young calves, high humidity, the presence of draughts etc. can all contribute as environmental factors, as can such animal factors as poor passive immunity (inadequate colostrum intake), weakening of the constitution through diarrhoea or other illnesses, navel problems, incorrect diet etc. It is my belief that a calf fed on cow's milk rather than milk replacer is less likely to suffer either diarrhoea or pneumonia but that is considered an impossible measure on most dairy units. Pneumonia is an umbrella term used to cover a syndrome appearing with fever, rapid or difficult respiration, coughing, inappetance etc. However, it covers a multitude of non-specific and specific infective-type disease or even combinations of these. Such viruses as BVD, can even, when affecting cows in the herd mildly, leave the newborn calf with an ongoing infection or a damaged immune system. We even find such conditions as intractable ringworm (another condition very amenable to homeopathic treatment) betraying a compromised immune system, which can sometimes lead to discovery of underlying infection with BVD virus, which can usually be controlled or even reduced to an insignificant problem by homeopathic preventive methods (nosode) via the drinking water of the cows and the calves (it may also be given in milk feeds but is not quite so effective by that route). The treatment of an outbreak of pneumonia, in a group of calves or in single cases is according to the same principles as for the treatment of mastitis. Symptoms other than the pneumonia may provide the clue to the correct prescription. For instance, a calf which is healthy one day and suddenly ill with severe pneumonia the next, with short sharp rapid breathing and possible bloody expectoration, may respond to *Phosphorus*. If, on the other hand, the calf is unwilling to move despite the rest of the group moving away from human attention, *Bryonia* is probably the remedy of choice (in this case, the patient would obtain comfort from lying on the side of the worse lung). If there should be drooling of saliva from the mouth and a loose, rattly cough, *Antimonium tartaricum* would be helpful.

In groups of calves, remedies can be put in the drinking water trough and are usually very successfully able to treat the group, without the need for individual handling. However should a particular animal be too ill or too immobile to drink, that clearly would not be a satisfactory method for that animal. In cases in which BVD virus or IBR etc. have been considered responsible for a respiratory problem, nosodes of these viruses can be put in the drinking water, both to help an ill group over the problem and to serve as an aid to prevention of the disease in at-risk groups. Of course, proper attention to ventilation, bedding and not grouping younger calves in the same building as older animals, is also very important and valuable in the control of pneumonia or respiratory problems in general.

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On the units in which homeopathy has been used successfully, a cheap, easy, gentle solution has been found to what can be very refractory, distressing and costly diseases. However, it must be remembered that it is merely a very powerful stimulus to natural healing in the body and best results are always achieved when management is honed to its optimum level.

*Book: *The Homœopathic Treatment of Beef and Dairy Cattle*, Christopher Day, Chapter 3).

Article by Christopher Day (written October 1996)

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