Veterinary nurses play a fundamental role in the detection of behavioral problems and in the application of the treatment programs needed to correct them.

Detection of behavior problems

Most ethological consultations take place when the impact of problematic behavior on the quality of life of the family and or the animal justifies the active search for help. However, with adequate detection protocols we would be able to address many more behavioral problems, and to intervene at an earlier stage of their development. For example, in a study carried out in Spain by our group with more than 600 dogs older than 8 years, we found a prevalence of problems related to aging over 13%. However, only 15% of the owners of these patients were aware of the problem. Other studies conducted on behavioral problems such as separation anxiety or sensitivity to noise provide similar results.

We see how the detection of behavioral problems must be carried out actively by the veterinary centre. The campaigns to identify behavioral problems face two difficulties: the low motivation of the owner and the time limitation on the part of the clinic staff.

If the family is not aware of the existence of a problem or its impact on the quality of life is small, their motivation and adherence will be very limited.

The real life practice prevents us from dedicating ourselves to tasks problems identification. However, we have at our disposal more and more validated clinical assessment tools, which allow us to obtain information on the behavior of the dog and cat quickly and reliably. In this sense, scales and clinical questionnaires are the most interesting ones nowadays.

The scales of evaluation of clinical interest can be divided into 2 categories:

- Specific:

Examples of this category are the CCDR scale (canine cognitive dysfunction rating scale) for the detection of cognitive dysfunction problems in senior dogs, or the noise sensitivity assessment scales in dogs. Our research group has participated in an international project to develop one of these scales, the SRS (Sound Reactivity Scale), which at the moment has been applied to more than 20,000 dogs.

- Global:

Perhaps the best-known example in this category is the C-BARQ scale, developed at the Pennsylvania Veterinary College. Through 101 questions in its full version, and 42 in its abbreviated form, the C-BARQ scale offers a portrait of the dog in 14 dimensions of its behavior, from aggression to behaviours related to separation. The C-BARQ scale has already been applied to more than 50,000 dogs worldwide.

Recently, the feline version, Fe-BARQ, has appeared that describes up to 23 aspects of cat behavior.

Scales and questionnaires can be applied proactively, for example, as part of a campaign for the early detection of behavioral problems.
The monitoring devices of the activity of the dog that can be placed on the collar or harness are a very interesting future option. In this lecture, we will analyse some of the options available today, their advantages and also their limitations.

Management of behavior problems

One of the main difficulties in veterinary medicine, in general and in behavioral medicine in particular, is to maintain a good adherence to treatment. The correction of a behavior problem requires the application of measures to modify the environment, and often the performance of behavior modification exercises. The nurses play a fundamental role in this area of behavioral medicine, in close collaboration with the veterinarian. In this sense, more and more nurses complement their training with competences in the area of behavioral medicine and canine education.

References:

