

MEDICAL CANNABIS

Pot Meds for Pets?

Patricia Wuest, Editorial Director, NAVC

Whether veterinarians are ready or not, their clients' pets may soon be cannabis customers.

"No matter what the detractors or the opposition say, this is a foregone conclusion," asserts Gary Richter, MS, DVM, and owner of Holistic Veterinary Care in Oakland, California. "Like it or not, cannabis is coming."

Richter has been actively supporting California's SB 627 legislation (Medicinal Cannabis and Medicinal Cannabis Products-Veterinary Medicine). SB 627 would repeal a ban on veterinarians recommending cannabis to their clients; similar legislation is being considered in other U.S. states. These initiatives are buttressed by medical research that shows marijuana may help dogs and cats cope with arthritis, epilepsy, anxiety, and other conditions without the side effects of traditional drugs.

Up until now, however, California veterinarians have been afraid to prescribe cannabis for ailing patients for fear of breaking federal laws and concerns over losing their professional licenses. "About 3 years ago, the veterinary medical board in California issued a memo saying that because there was no law in the state allowing veterinary use of cannabis, veterinarians were not allowed to discuss, recommend, or otherwise have

anything to do with cannabis with regards to their patients or speaking to their clients about it," Richter says. "Every veterinarian in the state was running scared because nobody wants to get in trouble with the veterinary medical board. When people asked their veterinarians, 'Hey, I want to use cannabis for my dog; what should I do?' the standard veterinarian response was, 'Sorry, I can't help you. I'm not allowed to talk to you about that.' So people started buying cannabis from recreational dispensaries and giving it to their pets. They were doing this based on recommendations they had read online or heard from someone at the cannabis dispensary, dog park, or pet store. We inadvertently forced people to do something that was effectively irresponsible and dangerous as it pertains to medicating pets."

In the Hands of Politicians

SB 627 is currently "in the hands of politicians," says Richter, but he expects California Governor Gavin Newsom to sign it once some legal wrinkles, all related to recently added amendments, are resolved.

More than 30 U.S. states have legalized medical marijuana, but none of them make provisions for veterinarians treating animals. "The reality here in California is rapidly becoming the reality in many other places in the country," says Richter. "Accessibility

is no longer an issue. The social stigma associated with the use of cannabis is rapidly falling by the wayside. Because so many people now are having very personal experiences with regards to how cannabis has helped their own health or that of a friend or family member, it's very natural that people want to have their pets benefit in the same way. All of the things that cannabis can potentially be used for in humans—pain, arthritis, seizures, nausea, anxiety—can potentially be used for in animals.”

Cannabidiol—a cannabis plant extract also known as CBD—is the main ingredient in hemp oils, chews, and other pet products that are being used by pet owners treating their animals for a variety of maladies. CBD is associated with pain relief, while THC, the ingredient in marijuana, is what's responsible for causing people to feel “high.”

According to a 2018 survey of 1,068 dog owners by Colorado State University veterinary medicine researchers, nearly 80% of respondents said they bought hemp or marijuana products for their dogs.¹

Clinical research into CBD is also showing encouraging results. Cornell University researchers found CBD increases comfort and activity in dogs with arthritis,² while a Colorado State University randomized clinical trial of a small group of dogs with epilepsy had “promising” results.³

The Current State of Affairs

Currently, California's Veterinary Medicine Practice Act authorizes the state veterinary board to revoke or suspend the license of a veterinarian, or to assess a fine, for discussing medicinal cannabis with a client while the veterinarian is employed by or has an agreement with a Medicinal and Adult-Use Cannabis Regulation and Safety Act (MAUCRSA) licensee and is distributing advertising for cannabis in California.

“And that's where bills like SB 627 are coming from,” says Richter. “Veterinarians should be the ones giving people guidance on how to do this, not people with zero medical training like the guy working behind the counter at the recreational cannabis dispensary.”

Richter says that if SB 627 is not passed, pet owners will forgo veterinary medical advice and care. “From the standpoint of veterinary patients, cannabis is medicine and it should be treated like medicine,” he says. “We want medical cannabis products to be sold in medical dispensaries only. In California, a person can walk into a medical dispensary with a cannabis recommendation and buy something. That same person can walk into a recreational dispensary and buy anything they want, across the board, no questions asked. If these [veterinary] products are allowed to be sold in recreational dispensaries, it cuts the veterinarian out of the loop. What we're telling people is that you don't have to go to your veterinarian to find out how to do this safely and effectively; just do it yourself.”

Richter points to 2 major problems with cannabis for pets being sold in recreational dispensaries. “One is that if cannabis is used improperly, it can be problematic from the standpoint of side effects and toxicity. And secondly, if you're tacitly encouraging people not to take their pets to the veterinarian in order for them to get medication, one wonders what other treatment options are not



BRIEF SUMMARY: Before using CORAXIS™, please consult the product insert, a summary of which follows:

- WARNING:**
- **DO NOT ADMINISTER THIS PRODUCT ORALLY.**
 - **For the first 30 minutes after application ensure that dogs cannot lick the product from application sites on themselves or other treated animals.**
 - **Children should not come in contact with application sites for two (2) hours after application.**
- (See Contraindications, Warnings, Human Warnings, and Adverse Reactions, for more information)

CAUTION: Federal (U.S.A.) Law restricts this drug to use by or on the order of a licensed veterinarian.

INDICATIONS: CORAXIS is indicated for the prevention of heartworm disease caused by *Dirofilaria immitis*. CORAXIS is also indicated for the treatment and control of the following intestinal parasites:

	Intestinal Parasite	Intestinal Stage		
		Adult	Immature Adult	Fourth Stage Larvae
Hookworm Species	<i>Ancylostoma caninum</i>	X	X	X
	<i>Uncinaria stenocephala</i>	X	X	X
Roundworm Species	<i>Toxocara canis</i>	X		X
	<i>Toxascaris leonina</i>	X		
Whipworm	<i>Trichuris vulpis</i>	X		

CONTRAINDICATIONS: Do not administer this product orally. (See WARNINGS.) Do not use this product (containing 2.5% moxidectin) on cats.

WARNINGS: For the first 30 minutes after application: Ensure that dogs cannot lick the product from application sites on themselves or other treated dogs, and separate treated dogs from one another and from other pets to reduce the risk of accidental ingestion. Ingestion of this product by dogs may cause serious adverse reactions including depression, salivation, dilated pupils, incoordination, panting, and generalized muscle tremors. In avermectin sensitive dogs, the signs may be more severe and may include coma and death.^a

^a Some dogs are more sensitive to avermectins due to a mutation in the ABCB1 gene (formerly MDR1 gene). Dogs with this mutation may develop signs of severe avermectin toxicity if they ingest this product. The most common breeds associated with this mutation include Collies and Collie crosses.

^b Although there is no specific antagonist for avermectin toxicity, even severely affected dogs have completely recovered from avermectin toxicity with intensive veterinary supportive care.

HUMAN WARNINGS: Not for human use. Keep out of the reach of children.

Children should not come in contact with application sites for two (2) hours after application. Causes eye irritation. Harmful if swallowed. Do not get in eyes or on clothing. Avoid contact with skin. Exposure to the product has been reported to cause headache, dizziness, and redness, burning, tingling, or numbness of the skin. Wash hands thoroughly with soap and warm water after handling. If contact with eyes occurs, hold eyelids open and flush with copious amounts of water for 15 minutes. If eye irritation develops or persists, contact a physician. If swallowed, call poison control center or physician immediately for treatment advice. Have person sip a glass of water if able to swallow. Do not induce vomiting unless told to do so by the poison control center or physician. People with known hypersensitivity to benzyl alcohol or moxidectin should administer the product with caution. In case of allergic reaction, contact a physician. If contact with skin or clothing occurs, take off contaminated clothing. Wash skin immediately with plenty of soap and water. Call a poison control center or physician for treatment advice.

The Safety Data Sheet (SDS) provides additional occupational safety information. For a copy of the Safety Data Sheet (SDS) or to report adverse reactions call Bayer Veterinary Services at 1-800-422-9874. For consumer questions call 1-800-255-6826.

PRECAUTIONS: Do not dispense dose applicator tubes without complete safety and administration information.

Use with caution in sick, debilitated, or underweight animals. The safety of CORAXIS has not been established in breeding, pregnant, or lactating dogs. The safe use of CORAXIS has not been established in puppies and dogs less than 7 weeks of age or less than 3 lbs body weight.

Prior to administration of CORAXIS, dogs should be tested for existing heartworm infection. At the discretion of the veterinarian, infected dogs should be treated with an adulticide to remove adult heartworms.

CORAXIS is not effective against adult *D. immitis*. (See ANIMAL SAFETY - Safety Study in Heartworm-Positive Dogs.)

ADVERSE REACTIONS: Since CORAXIS contains 2.5% moxidectin, studies that demonstrated the safe use of a topical solution containing 2.5% moxidectin + 10% imidacloprid were acceptable to demonstrate the safety of CORAXIS.

Field Studies: Following treatment with a topical solution containing 2.5% moxidectin + 10% imidacloprid or an active control, dog owners reported the following post-treatment reactions:

OBSERVATION	Moxidectin + Imidacloprid n = 128	Active Control n = 68
Pruritus	19 dogs (14.8%)	7 dogs (10.3%)
Residue	9 dogs (7.0%)	5 dogs (7.4%)
Medicinal Odor	5 dogs (3.9%)	None observed
Lethargy	1 dog (0.8%)	1 dog (1.5%)
Inappetence	1 dog (0.8%)	1 dog (1.5%)
Hyperactivity	1 dog (0.8%)	None observed

During a field study of a topical solution containing 2.5% moxidectin + 10% imidacloprid using 61 dogs with pre-existing flea allergy dermatitis, one (1.6%) dog experienced localized pruritus immediately after product application, and one investigator noted hyperkeratosis at the application site of one dog (1.6%).

Laboratory Effectiveness Studies: One dog in a laboratory effectiveness study experienced weakness, depression and unsteadiness between 6 and 9 days after application of a topical solution containing 2.5% moxidectin + 10% imidacloprid. The signs resolved without intervention by day 10 post-application. The signs in this dog may have been related to peak serum levels of moxidectin, which vary between dogs, and occur between 1 and 21 days after product application.

The following clinical observations also occurred in laboratory effectiveness studies following application of a topical solution containing 2.5% moxidectin + 10% imidacloprid and may be directly attributed to the drug or may be secondary to the intestinal parasite burden or other underlying conditions in the dogs: diarrhea, bloody stools, vomiting, anorexia, lethargy, coughing, ocular discharge and nasal discharge. Observations at the application sites included damp, stiff or greasy hair, the appearance of a white deposit on the hair, and mild erythema, which resolved without treatment within 2 to 48 hours.

ANIMAL SAFETY: In a controlled, double-masked, field safety study, a topical solution containing 2.5% moxidectin + 10% imidacloprid was administered to 128 dogs of various breeds, 3 months to 15 years of age, weighing 4 to 157 pounds. The moxidectin + imidacloprid topical solution was used safely in dogs concomitantly receiving ACE inhibitors, anticonvulsants, antihistamines, antimicrobials, chondroprotectants, corticosteroids, immunotherapeutics, MAO inhibitors, NSAIDs, ophthalmic medications, sympathomimetics, synthetic estrogens, thyroid hormones, and urinary acidifiers. Owners reported the following signs in their dogs after application of moxidectin + imidacloprid topical solution: pruritus, itchy/greasy residue at the treatment site, medicinal odor, lethargy, inappetence and hyperactivity. (See ADVERSE REACTIONS.) NADA # 141-417, Approved by FDA

Bayer HealthCare LLC
Animal Health Division
P.O. Box 390, Shawnee Mission, Kansas 66201 U.S.A.

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being discussed that could help that animal more than cannabis," he says.

Cannabis "is not a cure-all for everything," Richter stresses. "We have to give people the kind of guidance that they need so that they know what they should be looking for, they know what doses to give, and they know if it's the most appropriate medication for their pet to be taking."

Educating the Veterinary Profession

As a recent study found that client questions about cannabis were fairly common—only 8% of respondents reported that they'd never been asked about CBD products—and 66% said they'd never recommended CBD for dogs, while 12% said they "sometimes"

recommend them, and just 5% said they "frequently" do.⁴ Richter says "that most of the veterinary profession is completely uneducated on the topic. If I could snap my fingers and make all of this legal, and veterinarians could discuss cannabis with clients, the average veterinarian wouldn't know where to begin. There's got to be a huge push toward continuing education and educating veterinarians."

Veterinarians are at "an interesting and unique crossroads," says Richter. "It's time to set guidelines for managing cannabis in the veterinary profession. There's no group in the world that can give people better guidance on how to use any kind of medication safely and effectively for their pets than veterinary professionals. This is what we're trained to do." **TVP**

¹ Kogan LR, Hellyer PW, Schoenfeld-Tacher R. Owners' Use and Perceptions of Cannabis Product. ahvma.org/wp-content/uploads/AHVMA-2018-V51-CannabisUseandPerceptions.pdf. Accessed August 1, 2019.

² Gamble LJ, Boesch JM, Frye CW, et al. Pharmacokinetics, Safety, and Clinical Efficacy of Cannabidiol Treatment in Osteoarthritic Dogs. frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fvets.2018.00165/full. Accessed August 1, 2019.

³ Results from CBD Clinical Trial to Assess Efficacy on Seizure Frequency in Dogs "Encouraging." cvmb.ssource.colostate.edu/results-from-cbd-clinical-trial-to-assess-efficacy-on-seizure-frequency-in-dogs-encouraging. Accessed August 1, 2019.

⁴ Kogan R, Schoenfeld-Tacher R, Hellyer P, Rishniw M. US Veterinarians' Knowledge, Experience, and Perception Regarding the Use of Cannabidiol for Canine Medical Conditions. frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fvets.2018.00338/full. Accessed August 5, 2019.

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