

Cyber Veterinary Medicine

Electronic medicinal consultations in Israel have not become popular up to now neither in the human nor veterinary medical professions. However in the USA the trend is growing in the medical field allowing patients to video-chat with doctors on a 24 hour and 7 day basis. Patients can now sit on their couches in the comfort of their homes and consult with their doctors. This form of consultation has many advantages from the cheaper costs to not having to sit with sick people in the doctor's consulting rooms. No more travelling kilometers to the doctor and then struggling to find parking. One exception may be for individuals living far out in the middle of nowhere; under these circumstance this seems a reasonable solution. In addition, many patients apparently find it difficult to discuss embarrassing or taboo subjects with their doctors. A "faceless" consultation could solve this predicament. Still to my surprise cyber medicine seems to have caught on in the United States with some health insurers now even covering the cost of digital consultations.

Virtual appointments seem to appeal to many doctors allowing them to "see" many more patients than in their consulting rooms. Under these circumstances the "hands-on touching" approach is obsolete with the doctors relying only on their interaction with the patients. Research will show whether misdiagnosis is more common under these circumstances however one study has already found doctors prescribing more broad-spectrum antibiotics raising concerns about drug resistance.

The approach to cyber veterinary medicine does not seem to have succeeded so far at least in the USA. In November 2015 a Texas veterinarian who offered pet-care advice online lost a battle against state regulators after the U.S. Supreme Court declined to hear his case. In veterinary medicine it is argued that whereas humans can sit and answer questions the animals cannot, which makes the interview process a controversial point.

Whether in human or veterinary practice the "hands-on touching" routine seems the logical and best approach to gather information in order to make a diagnosis. To my mind this is basic to both human and veterinary medicine, and possibly more so to human medicine where individuals may purposely hide or disguise information for their own reasons. Whether the pet owner can accurately describe physical or behavioral changes is also debatable. One must have knowledge of the normal in order to appreciate and recognize the abnormal.

Taking into account the changes which social interaction is undergoing with the use of smart phones and the internet we should be aware that the approach to cyber medicine will grow to be an accepted form of medicine both in the human and veterinary fields. Some thought needs to be given to this subject by our legislators and a policy needs to be thought out to prepare us for what seems to be an almost inevitable change in medical practice.

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