

Letters

COMPANION ANIMALS

Measuring health-related quality of life in companion animals

I READ with great interest Chris Rundfeldt's excellent editorial entitled 'Quality of life of dogs with chronic epilepsy' (*VR*, June 25, 2016, vol 178, pp 650-651), in which he highlighted the importance of patient-reported outcomes (PROs), specifically health-related quality of life (HRQL) measures, in human clinical studies. Measuring the impact of disease and its treatment from the patient's perspective in this way is an increasingly important outcome measure to evaluate the efficacy and overall benefit of drugs. However, a PRO represents the effect of

the disease on health and functioning from the patient's perspective and is a report of the status of a patient's health condition that comes directly from the patient, without interpretation of the patient's response by a clinician or anyone else. Accordingly, it is impossible to have a PRO for non-verbal populations, in which case regulators encourage observer reports, but only where these include behaviours that can be observed. For example, in a veterinary context, an owner cannot validly report a dog's pain intensity, but can report dog behaviour thought to be caused by pain.

Increasingly in veterinary drug trials, the use of valid, reliable and responsive HRQL measures is actively encouraged by the US Food and Drug Administration to provide optimal information regarding treatment effect from the animal's perspective.

Using a psychometric approach well recognised as the gold standard for health measurement instrument design, a multidisciplinary research group from the universities of Glasgow and Edinburgh Napier have developed valid, reliable and responsive instruments to measure pain and HRQL in companion animals (Reid and others 2013). These use behavioural cues observed by the owner to measure how the animal feels about its circumstances – its quality of life. Being able to measure in a scientifically robust fashion how an animal feels hugely strengthens holistic understanding of the effects of drug therapies and provides empirical data on which to support better research and clinical outcomes.

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Reference

REID, J., WISEMAN-ORR, M. L., SCOTT, E. M. & NOLAN, A. M. (2013) Development, validation and reliability of a web-based questionnaire to measure health related quality of life in dogs. *Journal of Small Animal Practice* **54**, 227–233

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