

Psychoactive drugs – rational use to change dog and cat's stress behaviour during hospitalization

Proceedings of the 1st annual European Congress of Behavioural Medicine and Animal Welfare, Verlag der DVG Service GmbH, Gießen, Germany, 2018; 248-249

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When dogs and cats are hospitalized their welfare is usually reduced¹ and for anxious/fearful animals, environmental enrichment may not be sufficient to overcome their distress^{2,3}. Psychogenic distress may delay the animals' full recovery⁴, besides being a source of distress to others⁵. Psychoactive drugs are important pharmacological tools that help veterinarians to solve animal behaviour problems, improving their welfare⁶. Nevertheless, their use as a therapeutic aid in stressed hospitalized animals is uncommon. The aim of this review is to systematize information regarding psychoactive drugs that have the potential to be used in hospitalization to reduce dogs and cats short term distress. Recently, it was described the beneficial anxiolytic effect of trazodone in hospitalized dogs⁷ and cats^{8,9}, a useful alternative to the use, for example, of acetylpromazine, that has sedative and analgesic properties but little anxiolytic effect². According to the literature, several other drugs like benzodiazepines, α 2-agonists, 5-HT2A antagonists and gabapentin have anxiolytic properties^{2,6,10,11} in dogs and cats, but their use should also consider possible interactions with other drugs and the animal's clinical condition - pain must always be relieved as it is a fundamental source of distress. The psychoactive drugs bibliography is not consistent neither in dose nor in administration frequency, and most of their use is off-label. Further studies are needed for veterinarians to be able to use the full range of these therapeutic options so that their animal patients can be hospitalized in a stress-free environment.

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