Drug therapy for undesirable behaviours in dogs

Undesirable behaviours (UBs) in dogs carry potentially serious welfare consequences for both the dogs and their owners. This study aimed to fill data gaps on the usage of behaviour-modifying drugs to manage undesirable behaviours in dogs.

CONCLUSIONS:

- The frequency of drug-prescribed UBs was 0.4%. This could suggest that opportunities for useful intervention with drug therapy are being missed.
- There are concerns that UBs in dogs have increased since the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, it is more important than ever to ensure dog owners receive adequate behavioural support for their pets.
- Veterinary referrals to accredited behavioural specialists may improve the welfare of dogs with severe UBs.

What are the risk factors for drug-prescribed UBs?

- Neutered males (1.8x) and entire males (1.5x) had increased risk of being treated with behaviour-modifying drugs compared to entire females.
- Dogs aged over 12 years had 3.1 times the risk of receiving behaviour-modifying drugs compared to dogs aged under 3 years.

Most common undesirable behaviours diagnosed in the UK

- Separation-related behaviour
  - Restless at night
  - Hyperactivity
  - Male hypersexuality
  - Aggression
  - Anxious during travel
- Pseudopregnancy-related behaviour
  - Anxious for procedure
  - Noise phobia
  - Nervous aggressive
  - Cognitive dysfunction (senility)

A UB was reported to contribute to euthanasia (being put to sleep) in 48.4% of deaths among the dogs with drug-prescribed UBs.

The most frequently prescribed drugs for a UB were acepromazine maleate (32.1%), diazepam (20.6%) and propentofylline (12.9%).

Number of dogs in study: 103,597
Proportion of dogs prescribed drugs for a UB in 2013: 1 in 250 (0.40%)