

## Psychogenic alopecia in a cat: response to clomipramine

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Although psychogenic alopecia in cats is well known, little is known about its specific aetiology or effective management. There is, however, a growing body of literature on the use of serotonin re-uptake inhibitors for veterinary behavioural disorders characterised by repetitive grooming. Acral lick dermatitis in dogs<sup>1,4,6-8</sup> and excessive feather picking in birds<sup>2</sup> have both been demonstrated to respond to clomipramine. One case involving the use of fluoxetine, a selective serotonin re-uptake inhibitor, in a cat with psychogenic alopecia, has also been reported<sup>3</sup>. It seems that agents with dopaminergic or opioid effects may also reduce excessive grooming in cats<sup>9</sup>.

Recently, clomipramine proved useful in the treatment of a case of psychogenic alopecia. An 8-year-old female domestic short-hair cat, was presented with abdominal alopecia, resulting from a sudden onset of excessive self-grooming that manifested in licking and excessive hair-pulling. No changes in her physical and social environment were apparent. She failed to respond to a course of 1.25 mg/kg oid prednisolone (Prednisolone tabs, Centaur), and treatment with combined 0.5 mg/kg oid diazepam (Valium, Roche) and 7.5 mg/kg oid phenobarbitone (Phenobarb,

Be-Tabs Pharmaceuticals).

Two months later, a course of 1.6 mg/kg oid clomipramine (Anafranil, Novartis) resulted in dramatic improvement after 1 day of treatment. The cat licked minimally, and stopped pulling her hair. The owners reported that these symptoms would reappear just before her next medication was due. They reported her to be much calmer and more tolerant, and her usual reactive behaviour was reduced. She did not, for instance, chase a feral cat, or become upset by the resident dogs sniffing her. Significantly, the clinical signs returned almost immediately after clomipramine was discontinued, but responded to renewed treatment.

Further controlled studies are needed to verify the efficacy of serotonin re-uptake inhibitors in psychogenic alopecia. The results of this report are consistent with previous reports, and support a growing consensus that repetitive grooming and other compulsive behaviour conditions in animals are often mediated by the serotonergic system and respond to serotonin re-uptake inhibitors<sup>5,8</sup>.

### CONSIDERATIONS IN USING EXTRA-LABEL DRUGS

As Anafranil, like most other psychotropic drugs, is currently not registered for use in veterinary medicine, there are important considerations before deciding to administer it:

1. The client should be informed that the drug is not generally used for animal treatment.
2. The client should be made aware of the effects and potential side-effects, and be informed of procedures to

follow should there be adverse reactions.

4. An informed consent statement should be signed by the client.
3. Although these drugs are generally safe to use, it is important to do a thorough clinical examination, including haematology and blood chemistry, particularly to ensure that hepatic and renal function are normal.

### REFERENCES

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