

That's a claim!



Thinking critically about veterinary claims

Should I prescribe antibiotics? Which non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug is more effective? There are many claims when it comes to what is best for the health of our animal patients. As veterinary professionals, we have a duty of care for the animals we see. How can we determine which claims are trustworthy, and how can we be confident that we are choosing the best treatment options?

In this context, a claim is a statement that a particular treatment will have a certain effect on an animal. A treatment is anything you might do for an animal's health, whether that be prescribing a therapeutic, using a particular surgical approach or advising a specific course of action. Many treatment claims are made in the veterinary world about what is "best" for our patients; however, it is important to know which claims to trust. To do this, we must look at what supports a claim – its basis. For example, a personal experience is not a good basis for trusting a claim. This is because we have nothing to compare the claim to if that person would have done something different, therefore, the claim lacks evidence.

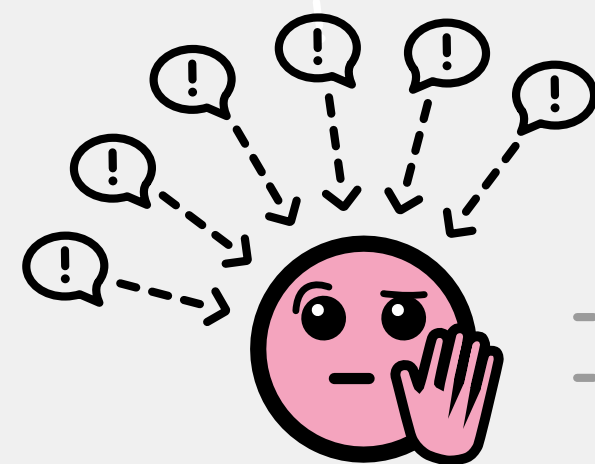
Three groups of guides
It is important to consider a treatment claim with caution. If a claim is unbalanced, i.e. does not argue both the harms and benefits of a treatment method, then it may be unreliable.

Assumption and trust-based claims should also be avoided as they are often biased and misleading (pink cards). For example, phrases such as "recommended by experts" and "as advertised" can be used to sway a practice or a veterinary professional to purchase a product.

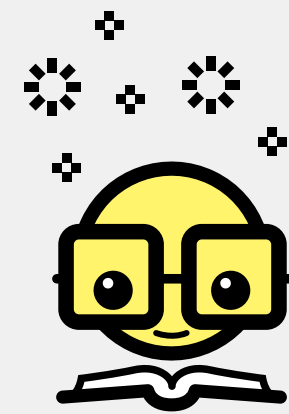
We must always ask for evidence when comparing treatment claims (yellow cards). Have the studies testing these claims been supported through robust research methods and have the results been described transparently?

Making our decisions based on context is vital when considering treatment options (blue cards). In the real world, there are many factors that will influence a decision. It is important to prioritise the key problems and consider if the benefits of treating the problems outweigh the risks.

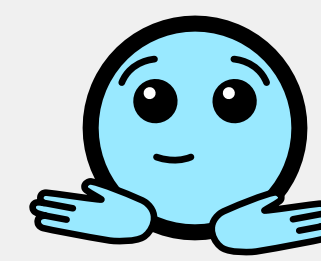
<https://thatsclaim.org/veterinary/>



CAUTIOUSLY CONSIDER any treatment claims



ALWAYS ASK about the evidence from treatment comparisons



CHOOSING IN CONTEXT is key for informed decision-making

CAUTIOUSLY CONSIDER
Look for a balanced view
"Is treatment necessary?"
Intervention is not always necessary; it can sometimes make a condition worse. It is important to consider the effects of allowing the animal's body to heal by itself.

CAUTIOUSLY CONSIDER
Look for a balanced view
"100% certain!"
We can rarely, if ever, be certain about the effects of a treatment as there will always be limitations and risks involved.

CAUTIOUSLY CONSIDER
Look for a balanced view
"100% safe!"
It is important to consider all desired and undesired consequences of the treatments available in order to be able to make an informed decision.

CAUTIOUSLY CONSIDER
Do not assume
"It works like this!"
Although something may appear to work 'in theory', this alone doesn't mean it will actually be effective in practice.

CAUTIOUSLY CONSIDER
Do not assume
"Associated with!"
Just because a link has been made between a treatment and an outcome, it does not mean that the treatment caused the outcome.

CAUTIOUSLY CONSIDER
Do not assume
"A study shows!"
The results of a single study considered in isolation can be misleading.

ALWAYS ASK
Interventions should be compared equally
Dissimilar comparison groups
The animals and the circumstances within the research studies being considered should be as similar as possible to those animal(s) being treated.

ALWAYS ASK
Interventions should be compared equally
Dissimilar care
Apart from the interventions being studied, all other factors, including animal groups, treatments, and study conditions for the groups being compared should be the same.

ALWAYS ASK
Interventions should be compared equally
Unreliable assessment of outcomes
Reliable and valid methods should have been used to determine the outcomes of treatments.

ALWAYS ASK
Interventions should be compared equally
Dissimilar measurement
The outcomes should be assessed in the same way for all animals in a study.

CHOOSING IN CONTEXT
Balance the options
Do benefits outweigh risks?
Weighing up the benefits and risks will enable decision-makers to choose appropriate treatment plans.

CHOOSING IN CONTEXT
Balance the options
Is it right for the situation?
The possible advantages and disadvantages of a treatment should be considered, primarily in light of the welfare needs of the animal(s). The decision-making process should also include the context within which the animal(s) is cared for, the logistics of treatment, and the circumstances and values of the vet, practice, animal and owner.

CAUTIOUSLY CONSIDER
Do not assume
"New is better; Old is better!"
A treatment that is new and/or technologically impressive is not necessarily better or safer. The same applies to older, well established treatments.

CAUTIOUSLY CONSIDER
Do not assume
"More is better; Less is better!"
Increasing the dose or duration of treatment (or in some cases, decreasing) may not be beneficial and may be harmful.

CAUTIOUSLY CONSIDER
Be mindful of the information source
"As advertised!"
Companies or individuals may exaggerate positive features and minimise negative features if they are going to benefit from the recommendation or use of the treatment.

ALWAYS ASK
Results should be described transparently
Misleading abstracts
Abstracts alone do not provide evidence sufficient to base clinical decisions on.

ALWAYS ASK
Results should be described transparently
No evidence
There may be no evidence at all as to whether a treatment works or not. This is not the same as when there is evidence, but the evidence shows that the treatment has no effect.

ALWAYS ASK
Results should be described transparently
Statistically significant
Deeming results to be 'statistically significant' or 'non-significant' can be misleading and should be described in the context of the aim being investigated.

ALWAYS ASK
Results should be described transparently
Few animals or events
Studies involving small numbers of animals or people may be inaccurate and could misrepresent the 'truth'.

ALWAYS ASK
Results should be described transparently
Just words without certainty
Treatment effects that are only reported descriptively are not adequate. When statistically comparing groups, confidence intervals should be provided to determine the level of uncertainty about a finding.

CAUTIOUSLY CONSIDER
Be mindful of the information source
"It worked for me!"
Individual experiences and anecdotes alone are not a reliable basis for most treatment claims.

CAUTIOUSLY CONSIDER
Be mindful of the information source
"Recommended by experts!"
Opinions of experts, authorities, or other respected individuals may not necessarily be reliable sources when considered in isolation.

CAUTIOUSLY CONSIDER
Be mindful of the information source
"Peer reviewed!"
Publication of research in peer-reviewed scientific journals is not necessarily a guarantee of study design quality.

CAUTIOUSLY CONSIDER any treatment claims
There are always harms and benefits associated with any treatment, so it is important to consider objectively all aspects of any treatment claim.
You should look out for:
• Unbalanced views
• Assumption-based claims
• Trust-based claims

ALWAYS ASK about the evidence from treatment comparisons
Always enquire about the evidence that is used to support the efficacy of treatments for specific diseases or conditions. Not all evidence findings have been generated using robust research practices, sometimes resulting in questionable results.
Look out for:
• Unfair or unequal comparisons of treatments
• How treatment effects are described

CHOOSING IN CONTEXT is key for informed decision-making
Deciding what clinical decisions to make depends on understanding what the problems are, what outcomes are desired and how best these are achieved based on the evidence available.
Think carefully about:
• Prioritising the key problems
• Balancing the options