

Creature cures.

Journalist Mark Elliott has been researching zotherapy: the use of animals in alternative medicine around the world.



It was in China that I first saw doctors using bees. A specialist was using the stings from bees to help people suffering from arthritis. The treatment is called apitherapy and although the stings must hurt, patients say that they feel much better afterwards because the treatment reduced the pain. In another part of the same clinic, a boy had his foot in a bath of small fish. The fish were cleaning an infection of the skin on his foot. Some skin diseases are difficult to treat with modern medicine. Research has shown that for people with these skin problems, this fish therapy could be more effective than creams and drugs.

In Europe, we've become more interested in alternative treatments like these in recent times, but Chinese practitioners have been using methods like apitherapy for thousands of years.



The Ancient Greeks also understood the benefits of using animals to cure or improve certain medical problems. For example, they noticed that people who were ill usually became much happier when they were with their horses. They also believe that dogs could help cure certain illnesses. This form of zotherapy is still popular. The patients of modern zotherapists spend time with domestic animals such as dogs and donkeys. It's particularly effective for people suffering from depression or loneliness. It can also be a very good cure for other behavioural problems like aggressiveness. The scientific reasons for this aren't 100% clear, but it seems that if we have contact with friendly, gentle, calm animals, we also become friendlier, gentler and calmer.



Some people may find it difficult to believe that these unusual treatments work. However, doctors who use these treatments are sure they help patients. The doctors say that the positive effects of animals' treatments are so clear that they can't be imaginary, as some people suggest. So, if in the future, your doctor wants to treat you with a dog, some fish or some bees, don't be surprised—it might be good for you.