

When the Patient is Man's Best Friend

Mel Bornstein

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By Mel Bornstein, DC.

Dr. Bornstein's practice near Stockholm, Sweden has one room reserved for the chiropractic treatment of dogs, mostly for emergency care. These cases usually have been referred to him by veterinarians.

Is chiropractic going to the dogs? Well, you could say in this case, yes! I am an American citizen and a 1979 graduate of Western States Chiropractic College. I began visiting Sweden in 1987, and through providence have been residing and working in Stockholm since 1990. I opened a clinic in a major suburb of this capital city, six years ago. The clinic is highly equipped, computerized, and designed in a modern style, as would be envisioned by most current practitioners, although there is an exception to the rule.

Our practice was established for the chiropractic treatment of people, yet for some years now we have utilized, mostly for emergency cases, one room which is reserved for the chiropractic treatment of dogs. Most of the cases we see, and a key element to this understanding, is that the dogs we treat, which are brought to us of course by their owners, have been referred to us by and through veterinarians.

This development began with my experience in treating race horses chiropractically, which I have done in Sweden and Norway since 1988. It has been very interesting and demanding work, both physically and mentally, and is obviously set in a vastly different environment than the human office practice. The work led to the development of techniques, based on the principles of biomechanics, which could be applied chiropractically to the diagnosis and treatment of NMS disorders in animals.

Probably all chiropractors have been aware that chiropractic for animals has been around for some time. In our case, for the past three and a half years, we dedicated a sizable amount of time, study, and practice in this direction. We chose dogs over horses, not only because they're man's best friend, but also because of the easier clinical controls. We also chose to target this endeavor within the good graces of the Scandinavian veterinary profession.

The project was a difficult and challenging task, and the effort paid off. We presented lectures at various well known veterinary clinics, usually to the entire staff in and around the greater Stockholm area, as well as other locations in Sweden. We came equipped, presenting ourselves, our material, and our findings. Usually we were invited (actually challenged) to "stand and deliver." We did this with a mixture a trepidation and excitement during time periods designed as clinical test trials. The outcomes were more favorable than we had hoped for, providing enough evidence to establish the need for our services, and carefully opening the doors for professional cooperation. At this point in time, we are working in three large veterinary clinics on a rotational basis. We are

given one or two treatment rooms in each clinic for ourselves, and our logo placards are prominently displayed in all the veterinary rooms, along with cards and brochures. Obviously it is much easier to practice in a clinical setting already designed for the treatment of animals. This may in fact be the only sensible choice for chiropractors interested in this field in America. Allowing animals to enter a chiropractic office in the states may be offending existing health codes and could be risky. Here in Sweden, pets are occasionally permitted to reside with their owners in certain types of health care facilities, such as geriatric homes and homes for the mentally handicapped. The government is now considering widening this practice to other types of health care facilities as well, as the benefits of pet companionship seem to outweigh any negative potentials.

If you think of all the wall-to-wall carpeted offices so common in America, it is hard to imagine how this could be used compatibly as both human and canine reception area. Here in Sweden, with its high standards for environmental cleanliness, carpeting in any type of health care facility is considered unsanitary and with considerable allergy potential, as well as being difficult to really clean. What I first thought would be a cold office environment, without the use of the carpeting I was so accustomed to, has with the help of a very beautiful linoleum turned out to be just the opposite. No worry about doggy accidents in our place, but you folks with carpets, you're barking up the wrong tree.

The company we formed is called Sunda Hunda Teamet, which translated literally into English means "The Sound Hound Team." To date we have lectured in some of the largest veterinary hospitals in Sweden, two times at the University of Veterinary Medicine in Uppsala, there most recently as featured speakers for the Swedish annual veterinary meeting in November 1995. This was a great honor for us. We have been written up in five different canine journals since forming the company three years ago, and now have been invited to write an advisory article in the Swedish quarterly publication HundMagasinet, a magazine about dogs.

Now we receive calls for advice and referrals from vets in and around Stockholm and distant regions throughout the country. This has added a new dimension to our practice, operating predominantly a busy "people" clinic, plus all that has transpired in the dog realm. We even produce two types of unique liniments for dogs under our own label. They were created in cooperation with a respected Swedish animal products laboratory and are sold in vet clinics and pet stores. Our present project involves the compilation of notes and instructions for the owners to follow for specific rehabilitation of musculoskeletal disorders in their dogs, which should help them to follow through with recommended homework.

Chiropractic can and does have its place in the diagnosis and conservative treatment of certain conditions in animals. We highly recommend for those who intend to enter this field that you do your homework, know the anatomy, and develop your skills long before you attempt to represent chiropractic expertise to the vets.

This last point is paramount. I believe we should act mostly in an adjunctive capacity in this field, working in full cooperation with those who are, for the most part, the true experts in comprehensive animal care. We have the chance to fill the void overlooked and/or hidden in the often accepted approaches of drug and surgical intervention.

Chiropractors have been used to the hard work of hands-on techniques. With our knowledge we can shine through as specified experts to benefit canines on referral from veterinarians who have ruled out pathology not within our scope of practice. I am not relating this position in comparison with the medical/chiropractic paradigm. I only suggest this route towards team play, as opposed to starting any other potentially unwarranted and dangerous professional turf conflicts.

Above all, the dogs seem to be responding favorably to chiropractic care. They and their owners are both wagging their tails, and this is no shaggy-dog story!

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