

Animal Husbandry

John Hanks, DC

"All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others" - From the movie "Animal Farm"

I was holding the neck of a bird worth \$5,000. The bird was a young female ostrich, and this was a few years ago, when these birds were worth something. The owner of the ostrich was Bill, a patient of mine, who had talked me into coming out to his farm to examine the neck of this fowl. It seems that the bird had run into a chain link fence, and since then, had been staggering around with an S-shaped neck. My job? Bill and I had wrestled the bird to the ground, and now I was supposed to adjust the hen without killing her.

The bird improved after two adjustments, and I was sort of proud of myself, considering the fact that I had no idea how to manipulate an ostrich's neck. But a vertebra is a vertebra, and somehow we chiropractors figure this stuff out. The chiropractic magazines seem to be showing an advertising trend for education in adjusting mammals, such as horses and dogs. Yet, those who know our history know that there have always been chiropractors who have dabbled in animal husbandry via the adjustment.

I am privileged to have known Louisa Beatty, DC, wife of Homer Beatty, DC, one of our educational pioneers. In Homer's 1939 book, *Anatomical Adjustive Technique*, Louisa is pictured helping to adjust a Boston terrier. So, chiropractors probably have been adjusting animals since the beginning. After D.D. Palmer adjusted Harvey Lillard, the first chiropractic patient, he might also have adjusted his cat ... if he had a cat.

Sometime in the early 1970s, I remember listening to Agnes Palmer, DC, who was speaking at a banquet about her adjustment of a chicken. Agnes was the wife of David Palmer, DC, the president of Palmer College at the time. She said the chicken was walking like a "drunken chicken" (?), and she decided to try to help it. I remember her saying that the adjustment worked, and I was inspired and impressed (because at one time, I felt I might want to be a veterinarian). But the chicken probably went on to become someone's Sunday dinner, *sans* subluxations.

Many practicing DCs have at least one story of adjusting the spine of an animal - often their own pet. I have adjusted my Basset hound, and my daughter's Pekinese, and they both became annoyed with me. My chiropractic father would adjust our ponies. He would hold on to the sick pony's neck and then fall backward with some twisting technique; quite inventive. I vividly remember Dad adjusting one young colt, right after he castrated him.

I try to imagine what a full-time animal chiropractic practice would be like. How many cages would be needed in the waiting room? A DC probably would need a tiny Activator-type gadget to adjust canaries and parakeets, or the occasional black-crested titmouse (*parus bicolor*). Would doctors specialize? Could there be certified rodent specialists? I suppose there also could be lots of house calls. Breeders of fancy racehorses could afford to pay for a DC to come out to the farm, but what about the owners of a fur farm? Would it be cost-effective to have a chiropractor come out to adjust a sick or injured muskrat or chinchilla? And what about the risks to life and limb?

I was fascinated by the true story of the Wyoming chiropractor who adjusted a Grizzly bear (anesthetized, thank God). Wasn't he afraid the bear would wake up just as he thrust on the sacrum? There is certainly the threat of being bitten by some pit bull or rotweiler when you are fooling around with their necks. People usually think their pet is nonviolent. I can almost hear a patient on the phone: "Don't worry, Dr. Hanks, my pet wolverine loves people!"

Perhaps we will see an increase in DCs adjusting all kinds of animals, such as woodpeckers, razorback hogs, or sperm whales. But what about invertebrates? I understand that 98 percent of all living species do not have a backbone. Can they benefit from some sort of soft-tissue manual technique? I know there must be at least one DC out there who would have no problem with treating jellyfish, worms or dung beetles. Yes, I am waiting to see a passionate article appear somewhere that pleads, "Invertebrates Need Chiropractic, Too!"

John Hanks, DC
Denver, Colorado
jwhanksdc@earthlink.net

APRIL 2005