



CHIROPRACTIC TECHNIQUES

## Treating Animals as a DC: The Good, Bad & Ugly (Pt. 1)

Kelly Thompson, DC | DIGITAL EXCLUSIVE

It's no secret that since B.J. Palmer first demonstrated adjusting a circus elephant, animals have been receiving chiropractic adjustments routinely along with their human counterparts. I am one of a small contingent of chiropractors who devotes time and skill to helping animals as a full-time practice.

Over this past year, I completed a research project, contacting every state board to determine the status of laws concerning chiropractors treating animals in each of the 50 states. If you are going to embark on this journey as I did years ago it is mandatory to "know before you go!" Now with attribution to the venerable filmmaker Sergio Leone and his "Spaghetti Westerns," his famous movie title will act as framework as we explore the many facets of chiropractors venturing into the veterinary milieu across our nation in this three-part article.

### Why This Subject Matters to Me: My Background in Treating Animals

To begin with, I think it appropriate to briefly delineate my bonafides and thereby dispel any notion that I'm merely "talking through my hat" when it comes to my hard-won knowledge of this subject. In brief, I graduated summa cum laude from the Los Angeles College of Chiropractic in 1981. In 1983, I attended to my first animal patient; a paralyzed dachshund who was slated to be euthanized. Perhaps as many of you have done over the years, I offered to do what I could to help my patient's ill-fated pup.



As luck and perhaps fate would have it (and to everyone's amazement, most especially my own), that little doxie stood albeit unsteadily the day following his first adjustment. Lucky for me and my desperate patient, her little dachshund's condition was relatively easy, with subsequent adjustments to resolve with only what I knew from my education in chiropractic college.

I had no idea at the time, flush with success, that a large percentage of cases I would confront over the years would go well beyond what I had learned treating humans.

Subsequently, that doxie's vet and other open-minded vets in the area who had heard about my results began sending me their "basket cases." These were patients who had exhausted all veterinary remedies. As in my first case, I often found myself in the position of being the last one standing between someone's beloved companion and their final resting place at Memorial Park.

This was and continues to be a very heavy emotional yoke to bear, but one that drove an unrelenting search for healing solutions in cases where I, too, was failing. A harsh task master to be sure, especially for one who loves animals, but one that spurred numerous therapeutic discoveries.

Since that first animal patient, I have diligently explored, developed and refined a unique therapeutic protocol, treating thousands and thousands of cases without self-promotion or fanfare. I had never needed a website to keep busy, but I finally started a site last year at the prompting of my clients. Since 1983, I have worked with more than 100 veterinarians in well over 50 veterinary clinics and hospitals in California.

In 1999, I ended my human practice to devote all my attention to helping animals and carrying on my own private research, which continues to this day. I currently see upwards of 40-plus animal patients per day in select veterinary clinics close to where I live in Silicon Valley.

With that said, let's explore the realities of working in veterinary clinics and hospitals, helping to

relieve the pain and suffering of animal patients, and filling a therapeutic niche that is demonstrably a "gaping hole" in the veterinary armamentarium. In this installment, I will discuss the many "good" reasons why you as a chiropractor might want to add your skills to helping suffering animals in your locale.

### Veterinary Chiropractic: The Good

On the good side of the ledger is the fact that currently, 21 states have promulgated regulations that make it legal for chiropractors to treat animals, with varying statutory or regulatory constraints such as chiropractic treatment being performed under the direct supervision of the attending veterinarian. For the most part this means a veterinarian has to be onsite, not standing over you.

Some states require additional postgraduate training to practice without direct supervision. You can view my research and find what the state boards say about your particular state by [clicking here](#). Additionally, a number of states where it is currently illegal are considering changes that would make it legal.

What is not only good, but great, is the fact that if you love animals as I do, you get to spend your days helping to end the pain and suffering of every type of animal you can imagine; and trust me, the need is great!

Years ago, I queried many of the veterinarians I work with as to what percentage of their patients were neuromusculoskeletal; specifically, those pets who enter their clinic with neck or back pain, limping or lameness issues, or pets that are neurologic, i.e., ataxic, paraparetic or paralyzed. Their responses varied, but the average was around 30 percent ... and as bad as the medical profession is in dealing with such issues in humans, the veterinary profession is worse by magnitudes.

Once you as a chiropractor become trained and thoroughly proficient at treating animals, you will be absolutely amazed by the seemingly miraculous results that can be achieved. For those of you reading this who are perhaps unaware of the full impact of what can be accomplished with your two hands, I invite you to view the "before and after" videos on my [website](#) to appreciate what is possible.

### Unbelievable Appreciation

A nearly universal phenomenon I have experienced over the years is that you receive significantly more appreciation when helping someone's companion than you as a chiropractor receive helping human beings. How many times have you literally "saved someone's life," getting them out of pain and back to work only to have them "turn on you" because they thought their deductible had already been met and your receptionist has some nerve asking them to pay up? Pet owners are viscerally and often tearfully grateful to you when you literally save the life of their beloved companion. They will write glowing testimonials on Yelp and become fervent animal chiropractic evangelists.

### Immediate Compensation

Another fantastic aspect is that you get paid immediately. No suffering the capricious and arbitrary insurance company antics designed to delay and impede the paltry payments you eventually receive for valid services rendered. Unlike humans, who may complain they need to stop coming because you are no longer on their plan or some other excuse, pet owners will frequently forgo even their own chiropractic care in favor of care for their animal companion. (During the 2008-2009 crash, my animal practice actually increased.)

## Far Fewer Practice Headaches

What's more, you have no staff and the attendant staffing problems to deal with. No hiring, no firing; no payroll; no complaining; no training, no complying with ever-onerous employment regulations or ponderous and invasive HIPAA compliance nonsense; and no threatening insurance company audits. You work in a clinic or hospital, someone else deals with all the inevitable headaches of running a business, and you are thrilled to pay them a percentage of your services to deal with all of the attendant "*bravo sierra*" (nonsense or foolishness).

On the expense side of the ledger, I pay only \$249 per year for malpractice liability insurance, and that includes veterinary board defense. Right or wrong, the law considers our pets chattel or physical property; consequently, malpractice suits in the veterinary field are extremely uncommon.

## Interprofessional Relationships

Last, but definitely not least, you work with extremely intelligent, skilled and yet very humble health care professionals. Vet techs and other veterinarians usually eschew the "doctor" moniker in favor of using first or last names when addressing their veterinarian co-workers. For the most part, there are no "God" complexes from my experience.

As with human medicine and even in our own profession sometimes, there is an inertia that resists change. However, despite "being late to the health care party," there is a slow paradigm shift occurring in the veterinary profession. Chiropractic, nutrition and acupuncture are all beginning to make inroads. As an aside, I like to joke that this is the only health profession where you can get kisses from your patients without running afoul of a regulatory board.)

When I started out in 1983, very few people had heard about chiropractors treating animals. Today, that number is increasing exponentially and there are relatively few of us providing this service. So, you can see the future is potentially bright for chiropractors who wish to learn to treat animals in a veterinary setting.

*Author's Note:* Parts two and three of this article will delve into the "bad" and the "ugly" aspects of working in the veterinary world, and why you need to understand these realities before you decide to add treating animals to your curriculum vitae.

MAY 2020