



CHIROPRACTIC TECHNIQUES

Treating Animals as a DC: The Good, Bad & Ugly (Pt. 2)

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In [part 1](#) of this three-part series, I discussed the many "good" aspects of chiropractors venturing into the veterinary arena. However, few worthwhile endeavors in life are all "sunshine and lollipops," so now let's explore the other side of the ledger.

What You Know Isn't Enough

Although it isn't necessarily bad to seek to improve your education and skill, know up front that what you learned in chiropractic college is minimally adequate to the task. Furthermore, it is vital to learn about diseases, maladies and time-critical conditions you must recognize in your animal patient, lest you contribute through ignorance and inaction to their untimely demise. This can happen shockingly fast in animals.

Even your palpation skills will be challenged. Examining animal patients brings entirely new meaning to the concept of motion palpation. Detecting the very subtle changes that tell you where and how to adjust are continuously obscured by a "blizzard" of other meaningless tactile sensory inputs as animal patients move about, wiggle this way and that, frequently pull away, and generally hold their epaxial muscles tense as they guard against the perceived threat of your examining fingers.



Consequently, even if your state allows you to treat animals with nothing more than your chiropractic license, you absolutely must avail yourself of one of the comprehensive postgraduate courses on the subject. In fact, more and more states are moving toward requiring upwards of 210 hours of postgraduate training both for veterinarians and chiropractors.

Not to put too fine a point on it, but for those of you dabbling with the occasional animal patient in your human practice, there's a considerable amount you don't know about treating animals!

More Than a Few Examples

Let me convince you with the following thought exercise. See if you can answer "yes" to any of the following questions. What if your animal patient comes in "pain posturing" (head held down, back roached, tail tucked under) and crying out; can you tell the difference between pain caused by an acute T/L subluxation or disc herniation; or the onset of pancreatitis; or perhaps an acute clostridium infection causing pronounced abdominal pain? Can you tell the difference between neck spasms and pain caused by cervical subluxations; or a fractured odontoid or syringomyelia; or a severe lower cervical sprain with instability?

Can you discern the difference between a limp caused by a small, but developing osteosarcoma of the femur vs. lameness caused by a cruciate ligament sprain or a subluxation of the hock? Can you distinguish between a dog that is unable to get up due to paraparesis vs. a dog that is just profoundly weak and infirmed due to illness?

Can you determine if an animal is panting excessively because it is in pain, or because it has dilated cardiomyopathy ... or perhaps canine cognitive dysfunction? Can you recognize risus sardonicus in a canine patient when you see it? Have you ever heard of MUE or GME in canines? Can you determine if a dog is non-weight bearing on a hind limb because of root signature, or because of a pathologic fracture, or perhaps because of a luxated femoral head, or a medial

luxating patella? Can you determine if that chronic thoracic limb lameness is caused by MSI or medial shoulder instability, or a subluxation of the carpal bones?

If you as a chiropractor can't say yes to these questions, for your sake and that of your animal patients, I highly recommend you avoid dilettantish dabbling and get a thorough education on the subject. Additionally, to those who insist on treating animal patients away from a veterinary environment, know that every single one of the above conditions, which are beyond the scope of chiropractic, have at one time or in some cases many times presented to me at a veterinary clinic or hospital. Fortunately, working alongside veterinarians daily, these were ultimately sorted out to the benefit of the patient and its owner.

Even If It's Legal, You'll Have Enemies

Another negative aspect of treating animals, based upon many correspondences and interactions with both California boards during investigations that I've had the unfortunate opportunity to defend against, it is my assertion that despite regulations allowing you as a chiropractor to treat animals in the state in which you reside, for the most part, at least in California, the powers that be really wish you didn't.

I've contacted all 50 states to determine the legality of chiropractors treating animals. Where it is legal, I believe you had better follow their statutes to the letter, lest they try to make an example out of you. Additionally, in many states where it is illegal, based upon numerous discussions with board officers, they are aware of chiropractors who are treating animals in their human clinics and will pursue all legal remedies at their disposal to investigate and cite you for practicing veterinary medicine without a license.

So, be warned: If you value all the years and effort you endured to acquire your chiropractic license, you had better take this very seriously, because trust me, the boards do!

Author's Note: Part three of this article will conclude this three-part series with a discussion of 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 resume.

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