

Acupuncture & Chiropractic –

An Interview with David Lowell, DVM

April 28, 2003

David Lowell has been practicing Veterinary Medicine for 22 years. His first 15 years as a Veterinarian were as a traditional western practitioner, practicing on small animals and horses. After an accident left him in chronic pain and with virtually no range of motion in his neck, David was faced with the prospect of neck surgery to fuse his cervical vertebra. It was at this time he began to experiment with alternative healing practices. He first went to an osteopath who then sent him to a chiropractor. The problem was completely resolved by the alternative care. This was a huge leap for David and he admits, "When I was practicing western medicine I did not believe in this work. Recently, my chiropractor reminded me of some of my own misconceptions regarding energy work. "Chiroquackers instead of chiropractors" was one of my own famous quotes. Basically, I made statements out of ignorance and lack of exposure. I think everyone works within their own realm of what truth is, and my realm was pretty small at that point in time. My personal experience opened my eyes to what truth really is and expanded my reality." For the past 7 years, David has had a completely alternative practice. "Once I began practicing like this I became healthier. My own quality of life is better now just as my patients' quality of life has improved. I am trying to live it too. I have to keep my life balanced to do this type of work and I think it is reflected in my family life as well as my practice."

Grace: In addition to your own health issues, were there any other factors, which precipitated the change to alternative interventions in your veterinary practice?

David: After practicing traditional veterinarian medicine for as long as I had, I began to see holes in it. I saw where treatment protocols were not complete or successful. I was always looking for different treatment protocols to use in my arsenal of treatment regimens. As I started using alternative protocols, many seemed far superior to the western protocols for certain types of problems. Although I value traditional medical diagnostics a great deal, I prefer to use more holistic treatment regimes than are offered by traditional medicine. At times, however I must incorporate the two for the best results on a patient. Occasionally, I will use small amounts of steroids or antibiotics for a short period or time. I have had much better results using herbal therapies, needles, diet, and chiropractic manipulations than I have had using steroids and antibiotics. In fact many times the side effects of the steroids and antibiotics create a whole new set of problems that I did not have to deal with initially.

Grace: How do you define acupuncture?

David: Acupuncture is one of several techniques that can be used to activate the nervous system. It was designed initially without the knowledge of the nervous system. Investigators now feel that the nervous system is invariably the common denominator. The same is true of chiropractic. When we do either of these two techniques we are creating a situation where the nervous system is receiving an input; the nervous system then responds by sending an output that affects the body in a predictable fashion. Because of our knowledge of neurophysiology and the centuries of trial and error techniques used by the Chinese to evolve their system, acupuncture can be used to treat many diseases using the nervous system as the big mediator.

Grace: How do you describe input and output?

David: When you put a needle in a specific acupuncture point, an electrical charge is transmitted to the spinal cord. The nerves that go into the spinal cord transmit sensory and proprioceptive information to the spinal cord, thereby inputting information. They then connect with nerves that travel from the spinal cord that go to the muscles, tissues and organs. This is an output. It has an effect at that level of the spine on the muscles in that region of the spine as well as the other tissues and organs that are innervated by the nerves from that spinal segment.

Grace: How do the needles work?

David: When you put a needle in an acupuncture point it affects the microcirculation and causes a micro-trauma at that point. That stimulates nerve fibers (c-fibers) and sensory fibers that go up giving a sensory input into the spinal cord. Nerves within the spinal cord connect and relay information to the brain to be integrated in complex patterns. The information is relayed back down the spinal cord to the specific target structures. Some information also goes right back out of the spinal cord without traveling to the brain, creating body reflexes. All of this occurs in microseconds, and in a predictable fashion.

Grace: How do acupuncture and chiropractic work together?

David: Acupuncture and chiropractic are both methods of moving and balancing “energy” or nerve function within the animal. As the spinal cord is the common denominator for both, the two work well in conjunction for superficial and deep problems. What I mean by superficial problems are problems involving the skin and muscles. The deeper layers involve the abdominal contents, the heart, liver and kidneys. Acupuncture and chiropractic work well together to help the animal move properly and align the spine, enhancing the biomechanics or motion of the vertebral column. When each vertebral segment is able to go through a full range of motion, nerve output to the target structures is optimal, and that target structure will be able to function as it should, resolving the malady.

Grace: How many visits will an animal usually need for an observable change in the animal’s condition?

David: It depends on the condition for which the animal is being treated. For example, with musculoskeletal problems I will do an adjustment and an acupuncture treatment and generally see the animal one week later. I would say 75% of the people see an improvement of 50% or greater with one treatment. Animals are pure beings and have no preconceived notions regarding these treatments. They demonstrate improvement to their owners. There is also an accumulative effect. I will gradually increase the interval between treatments and will eventually see these animals once every two or three months.

Grace: What are the most common disease processes you treat?

David: When I first started doing acupuncture people brought me animals that were lame, arthritic, bad hips, bad elbows, disk disease, back problems and gait abnormalities. Now about 22% of my cases are orthopedic and the rest of my cases deal with medical problems – kidney, liver, and heart disease as well as allergies and autoimmune disease. This is because many of the animals that presented with problems associated with pain would have other issues. The orthopedic problems would resolve rather quickly and we would then be left with the underlying medical problem, the root cause.

Grace: What generally motivates someone to try an alternative approach?

David: Many of my clients have a holistic approach to their own medical problems and use chiropractors and homeopaths as their primary medical care providers. They want their animals to be treated as they treat themselves. I prefer to integrate traditional western diagnostics (radiographs and blood work) and then seek out treatments that are more holistic in nature. Then we use acupuncture, herbal therapies and diet to counteract the issue. If we are not successful, we may integrate western medications judiciously in an effort to affect a good result. I also see clients that are referred from different veterinarian hospitals. The cases I get from these facilities are cases where western medicine has failed or the side effects from the drugs they are using create serious problems. Oftentimes, more natural therapies get the problem under control without the side effects, which are worse than the original problem. For instance, if an animal was diagnosed with Cushing's Disease, and the animal is treated with Lysodren and the medication creates a situation in which the dog is vomiting and has diarrhea, the conventional treatment cannot be used. I get those cases.

Grace: What disease processes have you found to be the most responsive to this approach?

David: Orthopedic conditions, hip dysplasia, lumbrosacral disease, intervertebral disc disease and liver disease, all respond well to chiropractic and acupuncture regimes. This is because many of the animals with orthopedic disease have significant pain and muscle atrophy. By decreasing pain and increasing the strength of weak muscles, the animal is able to compensate for the pathology that exists at the level of the bones. Often animals with orthopedic problems have secondary problems with liver disease because of treatment with rimadyl and steroids. Liver disease can be treated very successfully using acupuncture, detox protocols and herbal remedies. GI disorders such as irritable bowel syndrome, have responded well to acupuncture, diet and herbal remedies. I have found that heart and kidney, and cancer problems in older animals also respond well to acupuncture. Stimulating better function of these organs helps extend the life of the animal.

Grace: What is your definition of health and wellness?

David: An animal that is free from disease is in good "health". An animal that feels good with whatever medical problem has manifested has "wellness". We all develop pathology but many animals with my therapies and with proper nutrition don't develop pathology as readily as other animals. Invariably they are going to develop pathology because of the normal aging process, the environment, and what ever maladies they encounter. I find that acupuncture, chiropractic, herbs and nutrition create a situation where the animal has a good quality of life. They are pain free and their movement, digestion and respiratory function are all optimal. Health, or freedom from disease is what we strive for, and wellness for any given animal is always the best quality of life that can be achieved.

Grace: What do you do to help the animal guardians maintain this level of wellness in between visits?

David: I do many things. I often recommend other therapists, massage or physical therapists. I try to teach the owner to look at their animal in a different light. For example, if the animal has a liver problem be aware of the tongue color. A healthy tongue is a pink tongue. If the dog has an orthopedic problem and the dog's nails can be heard as they walk across the floor, then it is time to have their nails done. I teach massage and

different acupressure points so that it can be practiced between visits. I have so many wonderful clients that want to be so much more involved with their animals than when I was practicing Western Medicine.

Grace: What % of your patient population has been able to achieve this level of wellness?

David: About 85%. I look at an animal in a much more complete fashion, analyzing more parameters now. I have improved my powers of observation. I get more in-tune with the animals. I deal with problems and resolve problems that other veterinarians frequently don't acknowledge. The typical Western approach is if the lab work and x-rays are fine then the animal is fine; in spite of the fact that the owner may be saying "there is still something wrong". Now, I realize that when something shows up in the blood work or on the x-rays it is in the late part of the cycle. If I can catch things earlier by using characteristics of the tongue and pulse as well as talking with the owner and then treating with acupuncture, herbs and nutrition, the onset of these signs in the blood values and on X-ray are going to be delayed. I listen better to my clients now. I have a better understanding of the disease process. Once again, it is your realm of reality and realm of truth.

Grace: How do you deal with the deaths of your patients?

David: I am coming to grips with it a little bit better. I always like to think of the animals when they are not at the end. I hate euthanasia but I have come to the conclusion that it is my job as a veterinarian to make each animal's passing into the next world as easy as possible. I have come to a different concept of the essence or the spirit of an animal. As a western practitioner, I hated having to put so many horses down due to pathology and financial considerations. But now, having spent so much time keeping the animal comfortable and having a good quality of life, I think it is easier. I know we have exhausted all avenues of what we can do. I feel like I can read the animals better now and know when it is time for them to pass to the next life. Monetary reasons for euthanasia are never a reason in this practice anymore. Death makes you feel humble because no matter how great you think you are doing, ultimately, you are not in charge.

David Lowell is a dedicated and caring Veterinarian. He supports and encourages a fresh food diet for his patients. Both Molly and Penny enjoy his treatments. He may be contacted at 775-853-6002.
