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Interview with Wendy Robinson, DVM

*May all sentient beings be happy,
May all sentient beings be peaceful,
May all sentient beings be free from suffering
- Buddhist prayer*

Wendy Robinson knew in the seventh grade she wanted to become a veterinarian. She describes this decision as "a calling, a switch that just went off." Growing up in Danville, California, Wendy has always had an extraordinary connection to animals. She had horses as a young girl and was always bringing home stray dogs and cats. Completing her undergraduate work at Cal Poly, Wendy earned her degree in Veterinary medicine from Oklahoma State University.

Prior to her work at Sierra Pet Clinic, Wendy worked for five years in Emergency Veterinary Clinics in Santa Rosa and San Luis Obispo. Her transition to Complementary Medicine began a few years ago when her oldest dog was entering a time in life that sparked Wendy's exploration of new treatment modalities. As Wendy describes it, "I was not comfortable just throwing medicine at her. I received complementary treatment for myself first because I wanted to see what it was all about. I had been seeing a chiropractor for many years and began to have acupuncture treatments. These things helped me and I thought they would help her. I wanted to seek out the root of the cause of the problem rather than just masking the symptoms and soon realized this type of medicine allows us a better connection with the animals. It helps to create a more intimate relationship with both the animal and the owner."



Q: How do you define health and wellness?

Wendy: I consider the spiritual, physical and nutritional aspects of an animal's life. The spiritual aspect is often harder to capture but it is a critical component of health and wellness. If you can understand

the spiritual aspect and build on the positives then you can have a positive impact on health. All animals are individuals. I like to take into consideration why each animal is here at this time with a particular person and what that animal is here to accomplish in this lifetime. Emotions can create many of the problems we see in the animals. I tell my clients that their intuition in regards to their animal is powerful and valid. I may not see it in the moment but if you tell me something is wrong with your animal I will trust that even though the problem may not be outwardly obvious.

Q: How would you define acupuncture?

My definition is based on why the individual is bringing their animal to me. For example if it is an arthritis problem then my explanation might include, I am increasing blood

flow, the body's natural endorphins and the body's natural anti-inflammatory properties by stimulating specific points which stimulate the nervous system. For those people who have an understanding of Traditional Chinese Medicine I will describe the meridian flows and some of the pathologies of Chinese Medicine, such as dampness or heat.

Q: How would you define chiropractic?

Chiropractic reestablishes normal movement of joints and bones in order to support nervous stimulation and blood flow which allows normal energy flow through the body.

Q: How do they work together?

They work well together for animals that have musculoskeletal issues. If the animal is really tense and painful I will often use

acupuncture initially to help relax the muscles so that I can then do a chiropractic adjustment. Or if the animal is constantly out of alignment I will use acupuncture to help maintain the relaxation of the muscles to allow the adjustment to hold better. Acupuncture helps to change energetic patterns in areas which require the same adjustment each session.

Q: How many sessions will an animal require before the owner sees a permanent change in the condition?

I generally ask the owner to commit to 3-5 sessions depending on the issue. I often see a change after the first session. The animal will often become more engag-

"The way that I feed my animals has definitely made me think more about my diet. I suggest the possibility of feeding a fresh food diet to all my clients."



Wendy relaxes at home with her own pets.

ing. They may become more playful, or there may be an improvement in appetite. Some animals have what I call a functional lameness. They may be so arthritic that their joints do not function normally and they may never return to full range in those joints but I may be able to lessen the pain. The animal may have a funny gait but is healthier energetically and is much more willing to engage because we have relieved the pain and are strengthening their spirit.

Q: What are the most frequent health challenges you treat?

Arthritis, spondylosis, many cats with kidney issues, some autoimmune problems, and allergies. I am beginning to see more cancers in which people are seeking complementary therapies as a first line treatment. People are becoming more pro-active in the care of their animals, know to question long term use of certain drugs and are looking for alternatives. It is refreshing to see this shift toward complementary medicine when the issues are newly diagnosed.

Q: How long are your appointments?

An initial appointment with a new patient often takes an hour. I review their history, reason for the appointment, complete a physical, chiropractic and acupuncture exam. This is in contrast to a routine conventional visit which is usually 15 minutes to a half an hour. My follow ups are generally 30 minutes depending on the issue. I like to stay in the room with the animal during the acupuncture treat-

ment because I feel it helps to create and strengthen our bond. I keep distractions to a minimum in order to keep my energy focused on my patient.

Q: What things do you want to know about your clients?

I ask for many of the standard things like the most recent blood work values, previous illnesses, diet, and supplements. I then go into the Traditional Chinese Medicine personality types which include preference for hot or cold, soft or hard surfaces, stool characteristics, appetite, food preferences. I am looking for patterns in behavior and or illnesses. Does the animal snore, are they sound sleepers? I look at the characteristics of the tongue, shape, color, texture. Is the tongue wet and frothy or dried and shriveled? I also feel the characteristics and quality of the pulse which include texture, depth, and tone. There are places on the pulse which tell me about different organ systems or meridians.

Q: What are your thoughts about fresh food diets?

I switched my animals to a fresh food diet about 7 years ago and I could never go back to processed foods. The way that I feed my animals has definitely made me think more about my diet. I suggest the possibility of feeding a fresh food diet to all my clients. If the client is absolutely against it then I try to help them find a better quality kibble. If the client is interested in feeding fresh foods then we go for it. Awareness of and receptivity to feeding fresh food diets has increased. I think the diet recall two years

ago really awakened people to the dangers of processed food.

Q: What do you notice about the health of the animals that make the switch to real food?

Many of my clients with musculoskeletal issues are overweight, so with a diet change their energy and vitality increases and the weight comes off. The arthritic dogs benefit tremendously with this diet change. Unfortunately, there is still much hype and scare about the dangers of a fresh food diet. I have been feeding this way for 7 years, have never had an issue and have not had to clean any of my dog's teeth during this time. No diarrhea or vomiting. For some health issues, such as cancer, I will recommend the client cook for the dog. For these dogs I will also have the client stay away from bones. The key is to individualize the diet and treatment for each animal.

Q: How do you use vaccinations in your practice?

While I do not encourage over use of vaccinations, I feel there are some necessary vaccines. Like diet we need to individualize vaccination schedules for each animal. There are core puppy vaccines that should be administered such as distemper and parvovirus. After these initial vaccinations I encourage titers. While titers are not perfect they give you more information than just administering a shot every three years. For a dog I consider distemper and parvovirus to be the core vaccinations. Then there is rabies which is a legal issue. For indoor cats I recommend a PRC. If the cat is at high risk then I might suggest a leukemia vaccination. While there is no solid research that defines when the maternal antibodies stop and the immune system is activated, puppy vaccinations are usually started between 10 and 12 weeks. Currently I am administering a 3-way vaccine which has distemper, parvovirus, and hepatitis.

Q: As vaccination protocols have shifted and animals are being vaccinated less frequently have you seen a change in health issues?

I can't say I have made that obvious connection, however, I see nutrition as the primary contributing factor for improved health in our animals. As people become more aware of nutrition I think we will see greater shifts toward healthier animals. If you have a healthy animal they can tolerate the vaccines. Vaccinations can potentially tip animals with suboptimal health over the edge. There has been a connection between vaccinations and fibro sarcomas in cats. Cats can actually develop fibro sarcoma from anything you inject into them and this is not limited to vaccinations. Anything that stimulates an inflammatory response can result in a fibro sarcoma.

Q: How do you deal with death and dying?

Dealing with death remains an on going process. Each death used to be a burden I would carry. I am learning that death is part of the process. We are taught in school that as veterinarians we are responsible to fix all health issues and when we can't there is a tremendous feeling of failure. I am beginning to see there are some conditions that cannot be healed.

I recently had the most amazing experience where I was called to help an animal transition. As I was leaving the client's home I felt at peace. I was sad but it did not consume me. One of the things I like about what I am doing now is that I feel much more connected with my patients. I feel sad when they pass because of this deeper connection but I also know when it is time to help with a transition. This is in contrast to, "I have met you once, I barely know your dog, you want me to put it to sleep and you want me to council you on it." There were days when I might have 4 animals that I barely knew coming

in to be euthanized. I would go home and feel so deflated I would call it my work hangover. Euthanasia is now a way I can help my clients and it provides closure.

Q: What would you like people to know about Wendy Robinson?

What I am doing as a veterinarian I have incorporated into my life. This is a lifestyle, a forever learning process. I was getting to the point in conventional medicine where I was, more often than not, dreading going to work. The work demands could be overwhelming and chaotic. This has changed with my transition to practicing Complementary Veterinary Medicine. I now have more control over my work situation and like what I do again. It is a huge reward to have dogs happy to see you. ~

"I see nutrition as the primary contributing factor for improved health in our animals."



Raw bones are part of a healthy diet for dogs.



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After 14 years as a practicing veterinarian, Wendy is committed to providing compassionate care for her 4- legged clients and their people. She is always pursuing new treatments and is beginning a study of homotoxicology. I have known Wendy for many years and appreciate not only her knowledge and expertise, but the warm and loving approach she brings to her interactions with the animals to keep them happy, peaceful, and free from suffering. We are fortunate to have such a skilled animal healer and resource in the Tahoe area.

To contact Dr. Wendy...

Dr. Wendy can be reached at 530-448-0605 or by email through her web site at www.tahoeholisticvet.com and strives to respond within 24 hours.

Dr. Robinson is trained in Acupuncture, Veterinary Spinal Manipulation Therapy (Chiropractic), Homotoxicology and Chinese Herbal Medicine. She has special interests in nutrition, physical rehabilitation, herbs, and essential oils. Dr. Robinson does not provide services that require specialized medical equipment, anesthesia, grooming, hospitalization, or emergency services. She asks her clients to also keep a current relationship with a regular daytime veterinarian and or emergency clinic to meet these needs.

Dr. Robinson works out of Sierra Pet Clinic in Truckee, Burton Creek Veterinary Clinic in Tahoe City and is also available for house calls

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