

# From Go to Glow!

## Healthy Alternatives for our Pets

By Michelle Warren

From magnetic collars and beds, herbal based shampoos and conditioners to complementary therapies such as acupuncture and aromatherapy through to traditional Chinese Medicine, more and more people are seeking a new breed of pet practitioner and products.

Complementary medicine has long been used by humans as an alternative or adjunct to traditional Western medicine and so it's not surprising to find people seeking these therapies for their pets. But people wanting to explore complementary medicine need to seek out qualified animal practitioners, preferably with the guidance of their vet.

Dr Barbara Fougere is a qualified vet and started her studies in complementary medicine at university. She has been practicing complementary medicine for the last 15 years and established All Natural Vet Care practice in Russell Lea over two years ago. The practice offers a variety of therapies including chiropractic, herbal medicine, acupuncture, traditional Chinese medicine, homeopathy, IV vitamin treatments, Bach flower essences, physiotherapy, craniosacral therapy, muscle manipulation, dietary advice and massage. They tailor the most appropriate therapy for the animal's health condition.

As Dr Fougere explains, "We see a lot of animals with cancer, chronic skin allergies, long-term digestive problems, arthritis, back pain even behavioural problems. There are certain therapies that are much more suited to the condition than others. We see the same complaints that most vets would-it's just that we take a different approach to treating them. Sometimes we offer a complementary approach, where clients have their regular vet looking after them with conventional medicine and then we prescribe therapies to minimise the side effects of the medications and to improve their overall health."

"A great deal of our referrals come from vets and specialists where there isn't a conventional option. For instance some people don't want their pet to go through chemotherapy so we can offer an alternative."

Maroubra Veterinary Hospital's principal, Dr Adam Gordon, doesn't practice complementary medicine but he does refer clients to practitioners. "Just like in humans when there is an injury where a joint has been immobilised we now recognise that there should be some gentle exercise and movement to aid and speed the healing process. For instance we regularly refer clients to pet physiotherapists. Acupuncture also has its place in helping the healing process with some injuries and ailments. We know that it also can assist in pain management."

Dr Pam Short is a well-respected Sydney veterinarian who started using acupuncture at her Gladesville practice back in 1991. In 1995 she completed the certificate

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course of the International Veterinary Acupuncture Society. "The way we utilise acupuncture at Gladesville is not as an alternative, but as a complement to more conventional treatment methods. Many different diseases respond to acupuncture: musculoskeletal conditions such as arthritis and back complaints are two of the most common uses, but it is also very helpful in many respiratory, gastrointestinal, reproductive, urinary, skin, neurological, immune and behavioural conditions."

One of Dr Short's clients was Troy, a Labrador, whose owners knew he was in pain but didn't know what was causing his discomfort. Troy had been to a local vet but they were unable to successfully diagnose why he would suddenly yelp for no obvious reason. As owner Geoff Golden remembers, "My wife and I knew there was something wrong so we asked around and Pam came highly recommended as a vet and someone who could perform acupuncture. We wanted to see if acupuncture would work and it certainly helped Troy on the road to recovery."

As it turned out, Troy actually had a ruptured cruciate that Dr Short quickly diag-

nosed. After getting over the worst of his surgery, Troy had regular follow-up acupuncture treatments administered by Dr Short. "I believe acupuncture helped Troy in the healing process", says Geoff. "During the therapy, he would lie there and quiver and shake then would come over all relaxed."

So are we seeing an increase in serious disease in our pets or have pet lovers become more in tune with their pet's health needs? "I think animals are under more environmental and dietary stress these days, just the same as people are under more stress in modern living", says Dr Fougere. "As we know, stress can impact on good health and veterinary diagnostics are so much better these days. People do want to know what's wrong with their pet and want to treat it effectively rather than just leave it."

"When we talk about holistic veterinary medicine we're talking about all the elements of a pet's lifestyle and diet. We place a big emphasis on a healthy diet and what sort of foods to feed animals and other foods that can be used therapeutically. A good look at lifestyle issues like exercise and mental stimulation as well, is particularly important for dogs and indoor cats. It's also important to consider the relationship between the owner and the animal as well. It's the whole body, whole mind approach to the total wellbeing of the pet and this is important to determine the kind of treatment to prescribe."

To get a complete picture of the health of the animal, Dr Fougere will spend from 60-90 minutes making a full physical exam of the patient. "Especially with chronic conditions it's important for us to look at the full history of the pet and this gives us clues as to deeper issues. We also review their medical past from the referring vet so we can get a complete picture. It's the same as if you went to a specialist in conventional human medicine."

Dr Gordon believes that most practitioners are very realistic in their approach and what their therapies can achieve. "I don't see any problem in a client seeking alternative therapies for any animal that has a life threatening ailment. Provided the client isn't given a false hope on the outcome, I believe that most people would want to try a number of avenues to assist their pets."

And as Dr Fougere explains, "We see a lot of animals that come to us for palative care-say an untreatable cancer and our goal is simply to improve their sense of wellness. There are no guarantees in prolonging their lives but the main thing is that we get feedback from our clients that they believe the quality of life has been improved. We've had cases where a dog is due to euthanised and we're the last resort."

'Animals Great And Small's' Physiotherapist, Khristine Edwards, has been practicing on humans for 20 years and has been working on animals for the last seven. She was inspired to do a Masters Degree in Animal Physiotherapy after attending a conference given by some of the world's leading animal physiotherapists. As well as her own practice she regularly works out of the rooms at All Natural Vet.

"It's great to work in conjunction with a vet because there are times when someone comes in seeking Physiotherapy for their pet. In a number of cases, it's a problem that a vet needs to examine and treat."

Christine says that she mostly sees the same ailments in animals as she does in humans. "I treat a lot of neck and back pain and help treat patients who are recovering from surgery such as common cruciate injuries." Christine also practices acupuncture and says there are many benefits to regular treatments. "Acupuncture in animals is the same as in humans, there's a real relaxation they experience and in fact it can be quite a sedative."

Melanie Anderson lives in Liechhardt with her two German Shorthaired Pointers. Jep is ten years old and has just started to show the signs of slowing down, whereas Sam is a 13 month-old who Melanie acquired at 7 months. "Jep's mobility is still really good even though she's a little stiff getting off her bed. I decided to start getting regular acupuncture for her and I believe that it's really helping." Melanie has regular visits from Rae Hennessey who operates 'Mobile Acupuncture' throughout Sydney. Rae makes house calls and has a variety of clients including cats, rabbits and ferrets.

It was during a visit that Melanie enquired whether acupuncture could help Sam. Even though Sam's a young and fit dog, he was highly strung and was unpredictable around other dogs. "Sam's just always had trouble relaxing so I asked Rae if acupuncture could settle him down. After examining him she said that his whole muscle system was really tight. The kind of tension you get when stressed. She explained that like when humans have a tension-muscle ache like from working on a computer, dogs can develop this too. As humans, we make a conscience effort to work the affected area and try to release the tension with shoulder rolls or applying heat to the area. Dogs don't. After a bunch of weekly sessions I truly believe Sam has turned a corner. He's a much more relaxed dog."

Jeff Morrison has been a practicing Chiropractor for 21 years and jumped at the chance to do a Graduate Diploma in Animal Chiropractic when it was first offered through Melbourne's RMIT University. "For years my human clients would ask me about their dogs aches and pains. I couldn't address these problems without the right knowledge."

Jeff's speciality now is treating horses and is normally called upon when an animal starts having a performance or behavioural problem. As he mostly works on showjumping, eventing, dressage and racehorses, he treats a lot of soft tissue injuries caused by occupational stress. Jeff's quick to point out that people should only find qualified animal practitioners. "I've seen animals that have been treated by someone who might be qualified to work with humans but hasn't had any training with animals. They can do more damage than the original problem."

The market for natural pet products is also growing with new, emerging brands arriving on the shelves of pet stores. Sam Shotter's product range, under the name of Dog and Co, aims to give savvy pet people a choice of natural shampoos, conditioners and flea rinses. Her products are free of chemicals, additives and sulphates. With funky packaging, cute names and blends of natural and essential oils, Dog and Co's message is steering away from the chemical laden products that have been on the market for years.

Sam started developing her product range seven years ago and launched her products into hand picked pet stores and veterinary clinics 12 months ago. She was managing a natural therapies clinic and studying animal naturopathy when she started working on her range. "There were plenty of chemical based shampoos, conditioners and flea treatments on the market. They looked and smelled like carpet shampoo. There are many products claiming to have essential oils but in reality there's not much natural content."

Melbourne based pet product company, Herb Doctor also has a range of natural, chemical free shampoos, pet perfume and conditioners. Susie Ashley sees a wide variety of patients-both humans and animals-seeking her homeopathy, naturopathy and massage therapy.

Herb Doctor's products were also developed through the lack of chemical free pet shampoos and conditioners on the shelves of supermarkets. As Susie says, "Many people and pets have bad reactions to products that contain chemicals and I've always believed in trying natural remedies for allergies or other ailments."

There are a few 'pet perfume' products on the market but like many of the human, designer brand perfumes, these are full of chemicals and can really affect people who are sensitive to artificial smells. There are some people who really hate that doggy smell and try to cover it up with these products. However, dogs' noses are incredibly sensitive and to cover their odour with an un-natural and strong smelling product can lead to problems."

Most of the practitioners I talked to in this article all had similar comments as to why people were seeking complementary therapies for their pets. Christine Edwards probably sums this up with her observation, "Many of my clients know that humans benefit from these sort of therapies. And they say "why can't animals have the same kind of treatment". I think they're increasingly likely to seek out these therapies, after all, their pet is part of the family and an important part of their lives."





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## Healthy Alternatives For Pets

### Acupuncture

Acupuncture is a system of healing which has been practiced in China and other eastern countries for thousands of years. Acupuncture involves inserting fine needles into specific points (meridians or channels) that lie under the skin to restore balance and encourage the body to heal itself.

### Naturopathy or Naturopathic Medicine

Naturopathy helps the body to heal itself by using non-invasive treatments such as nutrition, massage and herbal medicine. Many of the basic beliefs of naturopathy, such as the importance of diet and exercise, have been adopted by conventional medicine.

### Osteopathy

Osteopathy works to treat the body's structure with massage, manipulation, gentle joint mobilization and stretching techniques. The belief is the body can't function at its best if the musculo-skeletal system is misaligned.

### Reiki

Reiki originated in Japan and is based on the premise that illnesses can be cured by removing energy blockages in the body. The practitioner channels energy through their hands in a particular pattern to remove these blockages to heal and harmonise.

### Flower Essences or Bach Flower Remedies

These are diluted extracts of flowers or plants. Similar to homeopathic remedies these have been used for centuries to treat emotional ailments like fear, depression, anxiety and sensitivity.

### Craniosacral Therapy

Focusing on the cerebrospinal fluid, Craniosacral therapy release and mobilise the soft tissue of the head (cranium), the spine and to its tail end (the sacral area) and the pelvis. It is believed that this boosts general wellbeing, increases energy and reduces stress.



Natural products from Sydney company Dog & Co.


## ANIMALS GREAT & SMALL

### PHYSIOTHERAPY

Kristine Edwards is a physiotherapist and acupuncturist with a Masters degree in Animal Physiotherapy, and works with both animals and people.

For more information please call  
Kristine on: 02 95604514 or 0408229341

Did you know that animals suffer from many of the same problems that we do, such as back pain, arthritis, traumatic and sporting injuries? Physiotherapy, corrective exercises and acupuncture can alleviate many of these problems, make your pet happier and reduce your vet bills!



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