

Hi, and welcome to Lesson Three, what's unique about integrative pet care?

I've been a veterinarian for over 20 years and when I first started practicing veterinary medicine, I was what you would call a conventional Western veterinarian. I practiced all of the Western medical techniques and surgical techniques that I learned in school, both in an emergency clinic and then later in a general practice. What happened was is after I'd been in practice for about four or five years, what I began to experience was I was running out of treatment options for my patient. I would have a dog or a cat that had a medical condition, say kidney disease or liver disease, and I would go down the algorithm that I was taught in school about, do a certain diagnostic test and then offer a certain treatment.

I would just kind of go down the line. At some point you get to a place where there are just no more options. Then I was literally left with having to go to the pet owner and tell them that there was nothing else that I could do for them and really they should just take their pet home and enjoy whatever time was left. You know what? That just really ... It really didn't sit well with me. It really made me feel like there had to be something more, and because of that, I started looking and I started searching to see what else there was.

One of the first things I found was I found Chinese medicine. I found acupuncture and herbal therapy. The more I looked at it and the more I studied and the more I spoke with people who practiced this form of medicine, what I started to realize was is the hard stops that I was taught in veterinary school about where the treatment options end, turns out that those are not really as final an end point as I originally had thought, and so because of that I got trained in Chinese medicine and herbal therapy.

Then I really started looking at other treatment modalities as well because I kept asking myself, "What else? What else can I do?" I became trained in chiropractic and then I learned about hyperbaric oxygen therapy and I did even more herbal training. I learned about things like physical therapy and medical cannabis and I learned all of these sort of non-conventional medical therapies that can provide an enormous benefit, both from the standpoint of treatment of disease, prevention of disease, and also really just maintaining quality of life, even for animals that have conditions that ultimately are not going to be curable.

What I'd like to talk to you about today is really what integrative care looks like, because I think a lot of people have not had the kind of experience with integrative care that would really give you a full idea of what that means. When I say integrative

care, what I really mean is taking a 360 degree view of healthcare. I certainly have not turned my back on Western medical therapy, whether it's pharmaceuticals or vaccination or surgery, et cetera. There absolutely are places where those kinds of therapies are effective and appropriate to do, but the thing to realize is they're not always the most effective and appropriate things to do. Really from the perspective of an integrative veterinarian, my goal is to find what is the most effective while being least invasive type of therapy that I can offer.

Again, I will keep Western conventional therapy in my mind and my thought process, but at the same time I'm also going to look at these animals from the perspective of holistic medicine. Now when we talk about holistic medicine, what that really means is that we're going to treat the patient as a whole entity. In conventional Western medicine, very frequently the animal or the person is sort of looked at as kind of a list of symptoms, if you will. We don't really look at the person or the animal as kind of a whole being, and you're treating symptoms. Whether or not you're treating a bacterial infection or fixing a broken leg, you're treating the symptom. With holistic medicine, what we're doing is we're treating the whole patient. Our goal is to support their body and to help them heal themselves.

In fact, I've often said with holistic medicine, in many cases, we're not actually even trying to directly address the problem that the animal came in for because realistically speaking, nobody knows how to fix that problem better than that animal themselves. Sometimes all we need to do is give them the building blocks and give them the materials they need to get from A to B and fix it on their own. Whether or not that's herbal therapy, that's acupuncture, that's chiropractic, that's some other form of non-conventional Western therapy, many of these therapies really aim to optimize body function and promote healing from within, because one of the things that that's really important to remember about an animal, about a biological system, is they innately want to be healthy. All of our bodies are designed to be healthy and to heal whenever they get half a chance to do so.

For example, if an animal breaks their leg and a surgeon goes in and puts a plate on the leg, the surgeon didn't actually fix the broken leg. We have to wait for the animal to fix the broken leg. All the surgeon really did was sort of put the two ends together so when it heals, it heals in an appropriate fashion, it heals straight, but again, we can't actually fix that broken leg per se. We have to rely on them to do that. That's certainly the same when we're talking about chronic digestive issues or we're talking about allergies or we're talking about most other medical conditions. The goal with holistic medicine is to give them the opportunity to heal on their own.

I mean, compare a biological system to a mechanical system. For example, if my car breaks, I could buy the replacement parts that my car needs and set them next to the car, and no matter how long I let them sit there, my car is still going to be broken, but that is not the case with animals. If you just give them the building blocks that they need to get better, they'll do most of the work for us. This is really where holistic medicine comes from is we want to just make sure that we give them what they need. Whether or not that means we're feeding them from a nutritional standpoint, giving them fresh, whole food diets, or we're looking at whatever medical condition they have from an herbal perspective, so we're giving them the herbs, so in other words, natural medicines to improve their condition, or sometimes it's more of a physical treatment or even an energetic treatment.

From the standpoint of acupuncture or chiropractic, what we're doing is we're putting energy into the body, whether it's physical energy through our chiropractic manipulation or it's more sort of energetic energy, if you will, from putting acupuncture needles in, or even something like cold laser therapy. That uses light energy to allow body tissues to heal. There are so many different kinds of treatment modalities on the holistic side of things that really complement Western medicine so very, very well. The nice thing about natural medicine or holistic medicine is very commonly when we're talking about side effects associated with holistic medicine, particularly when it comes to herbal therapy, very commonly the side effects are actually good side effects.

For example, in Western medicine, if we put an animal that has, say, arthritis pain on a nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory, frequently we have to worry about how that medication is going to affect their liver and their kidneys in the long-term. When we use natural anti-inflammatories, so things like boswellia, curcumin, these sorts of herbs, not only are they not harmful to the liver and the kidneys, but in many cases they actually help the liver and the kidneys. The side effects profile is actually a good thing. That's one of the things that I really love about natural medicine. Again, we can direct our therapy towards a particular problem, but we're still treating the animal as a whole, and because of that, we tend to have successes that you often cannot achieve with Western medicine alone.

After having practiced integrative therapy for a lot of years, what I have found is that I have been able to, and other veterinarians that I work with, have been able to fix problems or improve problems in animals that have been going on for a very, very long time, that Western medicine has failed to fix, because we're just taking a very different approach. For example, sometimes in animals that have seizures that are

very difficult to control, herbal therapy and acupuncture can make a difference where anti-seizure drugs can't. Sometimes when we have animals that have really severe arthritis pain, herbal therapy or medical cannabis or things like massage or laser therapy, again, can be effective where Western medicine is not effective. I've had animals with chronic non-healing fractures that Western medicine has very strongly recommended that a limb be amputated because it's not healing. We have been able to find ways to heal these animals through natural means.

Just to reiterate, I am a person who is open to and I keep my options open for all legitimate forms of medicine. It's important for me as a doctor to look at any potential treatment modality with a critical eye. It's not a situation that any medical treatment out there is good medical treatment. It needs to be legitimate. It needs to be effective. It needs to have a history or some degree of rationality and proof behind it, but we can certainly take those treatment modalities that are sort of outside of the box from a Western medicine perspective and integrate them together with what Western medicine has to offer and really achieve much better outcomes, keep our animals healthier and happier for much, much longer. Thanks so much for joining us. I hope that that provides you with a little bit more background about what integrative therapy is. In future lessons, we're going to dive a little bit deeper into some of those specific modalities of alternative care so you can really start to understand exactly what they're about and exactly how they work. Thanks so much for joining us.