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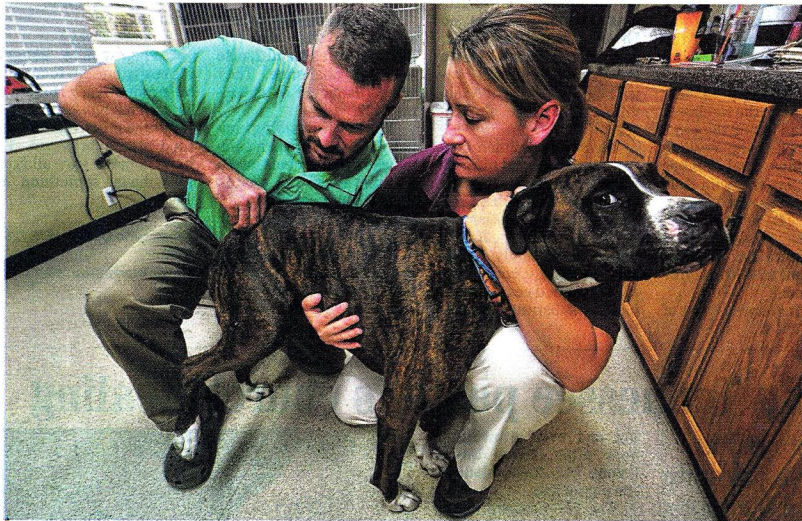
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VETS EMBRACE CHIROPRACTIC, ACUPUNCTURE



Veterinarian Marc Smith, assisted by veterinary technician Scarlett McMeen, performs a chiropractic treatment before acupuncture on Milo at Natchez Trace Veterinary Services in Franklin. PHOTOS BY DIPTI VAIDYA / THE TENNESSEAN

Alternative medicine finds place in veterinary offices

By Vicky Travis
The Tennessean

FRANKLIN — Four-year-old Milo lay down, stretched out his sore leg and blinked ever so slowly, as if he were about to nod off.

Just 10 minutes earlier, the pit/boxer mix, who was facing surgery on his cruciate ligament, was held steady as Franklin veterinarian Marc Smith placed about a dozen acupuncture needles in the dog's back and aching leg.

Smith regularly mixes Western medicine with Eastern techniques at his practice, Natchez Trace Veterinary Services. Animals are often treated with acupuncture, chiropractic and herbs, along with traditional therapies. Milo did very well post-op.

"He came out like a champ and went home this morning," Smith said Friday.

As alternative medicine gains traction for humans, Smith is among a growing number of vets who have added the therapies to their practices.



Dog Milo rests with acupuncture needles in his leg after a treatment at Natchez Trace Veterinary Services.

"Within a few years, it will probably be something people will just expect," said Chris Egger, a professor at the University of Tennessee College of Veterinary Medicine. The college, which this fall started an elective integrative medicine clinic rotation for its seniors, will probably add integrative medicine as an elective course in the next year or so, she said.

"In the last eight to 10 years, it's become much more common to see," she said.

Part of that acceptance comes from human experience with alternative medicine.

Equine veterinarian Mark Wooten at Nolensville Veterinary Hospital had practiced traditional medicine since graduating from UT in 1982. When his own back problems weren't getting better under a doctor's care in 1998, he thought he might lose his practice. So he went to a chiropractor.

"It gave me my career back," Wooten said. Now, chiropractic and acupuncture are a big part of his practice.

No horsing around

Then, there's Saber, the oldest horse on the force of the Metro Police Horse Mounted Patrol.

"That's my baby," said Metro police officer Karen Krause. "Or my problem child."

Saber, 19, somehow bowed a tendon in his leg. He didn't do it while on the job on Nashville streets, but when he was out in the pasture.

Like human pain, horse pain is treated with cold compresses, a painkiller Krause calls a "horsey Motrin" and a couple of days off. When that doesn't work, the vet is called in.

To treat Saber, Smith is using cold laser therapy, a boot that keeps the heel raised so the horse's tendon won't stretch and acupuncture.

"He's doing better," Krause said. "The swelling's down a lot."

As for Saber, he's not the first of Metro Police's 14 horses to have acupuncture used as part of his treatment. Smith has used it on Joe, who had arthritis in his pastern, a bone just above the hoof.

Krause, who has been Saber's officer for nine years, says Saber is walked every day.

"He had a pep in his step today that I hadn't seen in a while," a relieved Krause said last week. "He and I are retiring next year, and he gets to go with me."

Smith, who expects to follow up with Saber for more cold laser and acupuncture treatment, said "He's a great case. This gives him the best chance to do well."

Veterinarians incorporate chiropractic, acupuncture

Science-minded believers

Smith started a traditional practice in 1998 after graduating from UT's vet school.

"I would hear from clients or just people about chiropractic," he said. "I used to dismiss it."

Curiosity moved him to try acupuncture himself.

"I didn't go for any problem, but it was amazing," Smith said of the relaxation and calm he felt.

He learned Eastern veterinary practices at the Chi Institute in Reddick, Fla., which trains licensed veterinarians, during three months of coursework spread over three years.

His practice now is about 30 percent Eastern, he and veterinary technician Scarlett McMeen guesstimate.

While some seek out like-minded vets, there are skeptics.

"People are resistant for two reasons: They don't know enough about it or had bad interaction with it," McMeen said.

As she has watched Smith work on animals with Eastern methods, McMeen has been convinced.

"It makes a believer out of you," she said. "It'll flat make your jaw drop."

But Smith is clear about the importance of integrating the two.

"It's a mistake to do all holistic," he said. "Western modalities, like surgery, save lives."

Wooten agreed: "While the West is unsurpassed with treating acute things and infection, alternative medicine really helps with the chronic."

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