

A Touch of Wellness

A Q&A on Animal Chiropractic

BY ALLISON GEARY

PHOTOS BY BRETT DAY OF PAWTRAITS UNLEASHED

TO CONSULT WITH DR. WEISEL or make an appointment, contact American Chiropractic Clinic at (405) 275-6363. She visits the Tulsa area monthly for patient appointments at K9 Manners & More of OK, 1000 E. Memphis Street, Broken Arrow, OK 74102. Upcoming dates are: March 17, April 21, May 19, June 16, July 21, August 18.

She visits the locations in the OKC metro area monthly for patient appointments. Her visit dates in OKC and Norman are: Oklahoma City—A1 Pet Emporium, 2911 W. Britton Road, OKC 73120: March 10, April 7, May 5, June 9, July 7, August 4
Norman—Canine Sports Academy, 30217 Santa Fe Ave., Norman, OK 73072: March 13, April 10, May 8, June 12, July 10, August 14.

*Schedule subject to change.



TROY, KANSAS, IS A FINE PLACE TO ADORE ANIMALS. The small town, nestled near a bend of the Missouri River in far northwest Kansas, was home to a young girl who grew into an awareness of two things: she wanted to help others, and she wanted to get good at it. A self-described “poor farm kid” who loved animals, Willa Weisel, doctor of chiropractic, says that attending chiropractic college was a dream she could barely imagine attaining. As the dream was realized, she settled into a fulfilling career as a sports chiropractic physician for adults and children in California.

That may have been the end of the story had it not been for a heartbroken client and what Weisel calls a “God thing.” Her encounter with the client’s 2-week-old colt reignited her love of animals and forever changed Weisel’s career path.

And while it may have been a divinely motivating experience, the scene she encountered was not pretty. The horse had an obvious scoliosis of the spine and was unable to move backward or to the right even with its mother’s prompting. To make matters worse, the colt had a terrible case of diarrhea. Weisel’s client had taken the horse to a specialty veterinary hospital where she was advised to euthanize the animal.

“She said just out of desperation, ‘Before I do this final thing, would you come and look at the horse?’” Weisel said. With the colt tethered close to the mother and her client standing by, Weisel adjusted the animal’s pelvis. It was then she saw something remarkable. “It was just an amazing God thing to watch this little horse trot around there and figure out where its butt was! It turned

its head around to acknowledge it had a butt on the right side. Then it just kicked up and ran.

“When you have something like that happen in front of you, it’s not from me! How did I find that problem area and make one simple adjustment on it and have that affect such a positive change? It’s just a beautiful thing, a real motivating thing,” she said.

From that point, Weisel—once again—knew two things: she wanted to help animals, and she wanted to get good at it. She began treating animals when she did her certification program in animal chiropractic in 2004. She later added a clinical nutrition certification.

Today, her primary practice is at American Chiropractic Clinic in Shawnee, Oklahoma, where she serves adults, children and animals. Approximately half of her practice is now devoted to animal chiropractic, with an ample portion of her time devoted to visiting other cities and attending canine agility trials and AKC shows. In a given month, Weisel holds remote

clinics at locations in Oklahoma City, Norman and Tulsa.

How did you find your way to Oklahoma?

After completing her animal chiropractic certification at Parker College in Dallas, Weisel says she knew that she wanted to make a greater place in her overall practice for animals. However, only a limited number of states allowed for an independent animal chiropractic practice without requiring either a direct referral from a veterinarian or the presence of a vet during the treatment. Those states were Nevada and Oklahoma.

Given that her family was in the Midwest, Weisel said that exploring Oklahoma was a natural choice. She learned about Shawnee from friends and was drawn to its central location in the state. “I’m not one to be drawn to a city, but I wanted to be near enough so I could access them.” So, in 2006, Weisel sold her California practice and made the county seat of Pottawatomie, with its college town appeal, her new home.

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ment option. Is animal chiropractic considered a novelty?

Weisel says it is very novel, but she made a strong effort to let everyone know about her new certification. “I started to explain to clients that we all have a spine. It’s the same thing as we all have teeth. So, those things that we have as a part of our body need examination and treatment if we are going to maintain health.”

She compares strides made in public awareness about animal dentistry to the learning curve about animal chiropractic. “I think the dental industry has done a fabulous job of explaining that they can see into our mouths visually and with X-ray and determine a problem before it becomes full blown. It’s the same thing with being good at chiropractic. If you have good hands, and can palpate joint function and the adjoining muscles, you can put that human body or animal body through a normal range of motion expectation and determine if there is a restriction, instability, or a bit of heat brought on by some inflammation; that’s really something that people can understand.”

Does chiropractic replace traditional veterinary practice?

Certainly not. Weisel’s website (www.drwilla-animalchiropractic.com) notes that chiropractic is a drug-free methodology. “It works with the nerve system that is housed inside the spinal column. Animal chiropractic does not dispense drugs, perform surgery, inject drugs, and it does not attempt to replace necessary traditional veterinary treatment.”

Can chiropractic be considered preventive?

Weisel compares the process to that of human wellness exams. “I take [clients] through that whole exam process as a human patient and say, ‘Did you know that you had this spot here that was tender and restricted when you went to move your shoulder?’ So when you explain to them how this goes or show them on an animal—whether it’s a horse, a goat, a sheep, a llama or a cat—you can explain the differences in what normal movement ranges are versus ‘this area of the body is not moving the same way these others are.’”

What kind of animals can receive chiropractic treatment?

Weisel typically sees dogs and cats in her Shawnee office. She has also treated horses, sheep, calves, mules and a llama. She says the most extreme animals she has treated have been a duck and a chicken. “The chicken had a significant problem. It had been chased under a house by a dog, ran its neck into a wire and had instantaneous paralysis. This woman had raised this chicken and three others from eggs, so she was desperate to try to find some help.”

What situations warrant an animal chiropractic treatment?

Lameness and arthritis are two common complaints. Weisel’s website lists other indicators including trouble getting up and down, participating in athletic or agility competitions, seizures or neurological problems, geriatric conditions, and illness or injury recovery.

What is the experience like for the animal?

After taking a client history, the animal is taken to a treatment room where Weisel uses a vinyl-covered treatment bale. She places or invites the animal onto the bale and either sits or stands behind the animal, depending on its size. The owner sits in front of the animal in order to be face-to-face with it. “I use my hands and talk to the animal as I go along. They, really for the most part, are very good.” She notes that due to their protective instincts, certain breeds are not comfortable with her being behind them. However, that’s where the owner’s presence is helpful. “I am very careful and go through it very slowly.”

Weisel says that the animals are not tethered or restrained for a treatment. In 12 years, she has had only three or four instances in which she has had to put a muzzle on a dog due to the level of pain it presented. “I haven’t really had any incidents where I’ve been injured or the dog has tried to get away from me.”

What is your most unique experience?

She says that she saw a not-so-domesticated llama that was not friendly. “I don’t know if you’ve ever been around a llama, but they work their mouths and come up with something that is going to come out at you at some force. They are going to spit at you or bite you or kick you,” Weisel says. “They are not easy.”

In the end, however, her devotion to animal well-being and quality of life is what motivates her to continue to provide a healing touch to all of her clients. ■