

The following is from the Alberta Report, March 23, 1998:

A backbone is a backbone

Alberta's vets are out of joint over animal chiropractic

photographer

A turf war has broken out between the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) and the province's chiropractors over animal chiropractic, a booming billion-dollar industry in the United States now taking hold in Canada. The practice is used to relieve spinal injuries and pain in animals ranging from the family pet to livestock and race horses. Few veterinarians are trained in the arcane art of spinal manipulation, and so, since 1992, vets have been permitted to refer patients to chiropractors and supervise the subsequent treatment. That amiable relationship ended earlier this year, however, when Edmonton chiropractor Daniel Martin agreed to treat a sick dog without a referral.

Dr. Martin apparently cured the dog of severe vomiting and diarrhea in just a few chiropractic treatments? a feat the animal's veterinarian had failed at over nine months. When the pet owner complained to the AVMA, the association retaliated by lodging a complaint against Dr. Martin with the College of Chiropractors in Alberta (CCA). Dr. Martin is now under investigation by the CCA for unlawful practice and has been ordered, as have all Alberta's chiropractors, to cease and desist all four-legged practice.

Dr. Martin is one of five chiropractors in Alberta certified in animal chiropractics by the American Veterinary Chiropractic Association (AVCA) in Hillside, Illinois, where he sits on the AVCA board of directors and teaches its animal chiropractics course once a month. He says the investigation is ridiculous. "I've been trying to work with the AVMA for the past five years to establish guidelines for the province," he says. "Vets are very territorial and they want a monopoly on the treatment of animals. The treatment of the dog, with the results that were achieved through chiropractic care, was the straw that broke the camel's back."

As recently as January, AVMA members voted against establishing protocols for the cooperative treatment of animals between chiropractors and veterinarians. Still, AVMA spokesman Robert Moyles denies any dark motive. "What happened was people were taking their animals to the chiropractor's office to have this done, or the chiropractor would visit them on the farm," he says. "We still feel that the most appropriate person to make the diagnosis is the vet." The move was also made, he says, to protect the public against fraudulent practitioners.

As a result of the AVMA stand, CCA Registrar Douglas Lawson was forced to fire off a memo to the association's 526 members warning that any member treating an animal is practising outside of the scope of the Chiropractic Profession Act (CPA) in Alberta and is, like Dr. Martin, subject to criminal investigation. CCA president Les Shaw adds that until some kind of policy is on paper, the cease-and-desist order stands. "Really what is happening in health care in general is turf protecting," he says. "It has to be cut and dried to foster a good working relationship."

Dr. Martin, meanwhile, is in limbo until the investigation ends. "I've got animals out there who need care and the vets are telling me I can't treat them," he says angrily. "My association is watching me like a hawk. I'm going to be the test case for all this and in the meantime the animals suffer. That's what really ticks me off."

-- Gina Teel