

Complimentary Aromatherapy for Animals:

Dear Editor,

Having a background saturated with horse education and training and I find myself working more and more with animals in my Aromatherapy business. Not wishing to over step my legal boundaries and being slapped with a law suit, I have been researching to find out what guidelines and regulations are in place for an Aromatherapist in Alberta /Canada who is or would like to work with animals~ what I have learned to date is eye opening to say the least:

For humans we have the NHPD that regulates Aromatherapy /Essential oil products that are deemed to have healing or therapeutic qualities "In Human Products". However the NHPD Regulations (*as I understand from our Aromatherapy people and people with in Alberta Agriculture who are working close to the NHPD*), the NHPD (http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/dhp-mps/prodnatur/index_e.html) does not regulate products or complimentary therapy intended for animals. They fall under the jurisdiction of the Veterinary Drugs Directorate (VDD) ~ *The VDD works both at a national and international level in collaboration with other jurisdictions and key stakeholder groups, including drug manufacturers, veterinarians, livestock producers and feed manufacturers. Each group plays a vital role in maintaining Canada's high standards for safe food and safe and effective veterinary drugs. ** (http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/dhp-mps/vet/index_e.html)

What we do have in place to govern EOs in animal products /treatments falls under the regulations in the Food and Drug act as well as the Cosmetic Regulations (http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/cps-spc/person/cosmet/index_e.html), however neither of these regulations cover therapeutic animal products such as liniment for after a training sessions or wound salve for minor scrapes and abrasions. We can safely produce and use cosmetic animal products such as shampoos or moisturizers that do not carry labeling with any therapeutic suggestions or content (strictly cosmetic labeling and use only).

BUT! And this is where it begins to get sticky, if we use or apply "Any" cosmetic product or complimentary therapy product to an animal that is deemed as a food-producing animal i.e. Cow, Pig, Sheep and Horses (*horses are still slaughtered and shipped to over seas markets for human consumption and used in pet foods*).

The product has to be tested for residuals that may be left in the tissues of the food-producing animal. The level of residual tolerated by the Government powers that be, who are in charge of this process are regulated through strict lab testing and assigned a "deemed safe" level of residual and a time frame warning that is to be applied on the product label. Now any product that does not under go this kind of testing is automatically given a "ZERO Tolerance", meaning there can be absolutely no residual left in the food animals body if /or when tested.

Most Veterinary products like Dewormers or Cosmetic products like coat enhancers or shampoos state on the label that they should not be used on animals intended for slaughter with 30 days.

These same regulations apply to animals that we would treat with our complimentary Aromatherapy treatments, i.e. application of essential oil (EO) blend for anxiety, depression. With our training in Essential oils we know that the residual time of EO's in the body can be short depending on the size and fats in the body. However until we have laboratory evidence on how long each specific oil lasts in a specific animal body, I would prefer to follow the norm and list on my labels "Not be used on animals intended for slaughter within 30 days".

This might leave us to say ok I'll only work with small animals i.e. Dogs, cats etc. This however is not as simple an option as it may seem. When inquiring about residual testing of EO's in animal bodies, with the head of Pharmacology in Canada ~Dr. Trish Dowling DVM, MS, DACVIM & DACVCP Professor, Veterinary Clinical Pharmacology Director, Western Centre Canadian FARAD of the Western Veterinary School of Medicine in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan; she would not comment but instead informed me, that we really need to be careful. I quote:

"In my opinion what you are doing may be construed as practicing veterinary medicine without a license and you should contact the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association for specific guidance."

Upon this recommendation, I emailed the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association and have requested their help and input in regards to how Aromatherapists can proceed with working with clients animals (both food producing and pet) by supplying complimentary Aromatherapy therapies and Essential oil products.

I have specifically requested information to "when" we would need a Veterinarian's written consent and "when we would not", below is the reply that I received:

Dear Holly:

Thank you for your letter of inquiry. It is refreshing to see someone ask before they jump into uncharted waters.

The Alberta Veterinary Medical Association utilized the following definition, which is incorporated into Federal Acts:

The definition of Veterinary Medicine as defined by the Federal Government and all Provincial Governments and Territories in the "Agreement on Mobility of Veterinarians within Canada" is: "Veterinary Medicine" means the practice of veterinary medicine, surgery and dentistry, and includes the examining, diagnosing, prescribing, manipulation and treating for the prevention, alleviation or correction of a disease, injury, condition, deformity, defect, or lesion in

an animal with or without the use of any instrument, appliance, drug or biologics.

With this consideration, I believe that any therapy or treatment on animals must be done in compliance with the Veterinary Profession Act of Alberta, which only allows a registered veterinarian or registered animal health technologist under the supervision of a veterinarian to treat animals.

We do however allow professionals to collaborate in the treatment of animals if indicated. Veterinarians may only legally associate with professionals who are regulated by statute of the Government of Alberta, which means that the government controls the educational requirements and legislates the discipline process. There are many human health professionals that may benefit animals when applied in collaboration with veterinarians. Government regulated human health professionals and alternate therapies may work with supervising veterinarians. It would not be appropriate for a physician to treat an animal, or a veterinarian to treat a human. It follows that it is not appropriate for practitioners of alternate therapies for humans to treat animals.

It would not be impossible to work in the area of veterinary aromatherapy but first the discipline must be recognized and regulated by legislation of the Government of Alberta and then it must be done in collaboration with a veterinarian licensed within the province.

Clay Gellhaus DVM
Deputy Registrar

A straight answer to my question, a polite “you can not do this with out the proper legislation and training” ~ perfectly understandable, thus bringing us to the information that I found in the December/ January 2005/ 2006 issue of Horse Care Magazine about the on going conflict between the Alberta Veterinary Medicine Association (AVMA) and non-veterinary practitioners (Equine dentists, massage therapists, Natural paths, Aromatherapists etc.) titled “Vets versus Non Vets ~ round 2” pg 8 (<http://www.horsecaremagazine.com>) The article covers the ongoing legal struggle between the AVMA and Non -Vets.

Part of the article states, the AVMA has proposed changes to the provincial Veterinary Profession Act (*it is thought that this proposal will be brought before Alberta legislation in the Spring of 2006*). “The move is viewed by many (Non-Vets) as the organization’s latest bid to seize control of the province’s animal care industry”.

Below is a detailed list of proposed changes:

The Alberta Veterinary Medicine Association (AVMA) has proposed changes to expand the definition of veterinary medicine under the provincial Veterinary Profession Act (VPA).

According to the AVMA, “The proposed amendments would address concerns noted by the Alberta Court of Appeal that the current definition of Veterinarian Medicine is too general in nature. In addition the proposed amendments would conform to other Alberta Professional Legislation, notably the Health Professions Act, the principles contained in which is the basis for Alberta Professional Legislation.”

Currently Section 1(p) of the act defines “veterinary medicine” as a medical service performed with respect to an animal and includes surgery, obstetrics and ova and embryo collection and prescribing, compounding, dispensing and selling of drugs.

The proposed amendment is considerably more detailed, defining veterinary medicine as that branch of knowledge that relates to maintaining the health of animals and to preventing, diagnosing and healing diseases and injuries to animals. As well, the AVMA hopes to add further definitions to the practice of veterinary medicine "to more fully reflect the range of medical services performed with respect to an animal including:

- a) Advising, demonstrating, teaching, inspecting, regulating or conducting research in respect to veterinary medicine.
- b) Examining, diagnosing, prescribing, manipulating and treating for the prevention, alleviation or correction of a disease, injury, condition, deformity, defect, or lesion of an animal with or without the use of any instrument, appliance, drug or veterinary biologic.
- c) Prescribing, compounding, dispensing and selling a drug or veterinary biologic medicine, appliance, or treatment of whatever nature for an animal.
- d) Administrating a drug, veterinary biologic medicine, appliance or treatment of whatever nature to an animal.
- e) Performing a surgical operation on an animal.
- f) Performing a procedure for the diagnosis of pregnancy, sterility or infertility on an animal.
- g) Practicing veterinary dentistry consisting of all prophylactic, medical and surgical procedures within an animal's mouth.
- h) Performing obstetrics and ova and embryo collection on an animal and
- i) Certifying the cause of death of an animal."
 - a) The proposal marks the latest development in an ongoing struggle between the AVMA and non-veterinary equine care providers over who has the right to practice on horses. Last year the clash came to a head in court when the AVMA filed a suit against Alberta farrier Louis Penquin for practicing equine dentistry. The AVMA lost the case on appeal.

According to the article “Vets versus Non Vets”, the AVMA feels “These proposed amendments would address concerns noted by the Alberta Court of Appeal, that the current definition of Veterinarian Medicine is too general in nature. In addition the proposed amendments would conform to other Alberta Professional Legislation, notably the Health Professions Act, the principles contained in which is the basis for Alberta Professional Legislation”

Non -Vet Industry insiders (Equine Dentists and related holistic practices) state that the Alberta court of appeal did not have issue with the current definition of Veterinarian medicine and with support from the Alberta Beef Producers feel that this is a move on the AVMA's behalf to bring services, previously not prohibited by the Act under the exclusive control of the veterinarians and the technicians

they supervise. Caught in this net would not only be equine dentists, “*which was the trigger for the proposed amendments*”, but also persons who provide animal health and care advice, nutritional advice, chiropractic, physical and massage therapy, holistic therapy’s and any other existing or future service relating to the health of animals.

This article concludes with Non-veterinary professionals (*who are fighting these proposed changes*), urging Alberta horse and animal owners to contact their local MLA and demand that changes to the Act not be entertained until a full public report is issued.

In light of this, it would seem that any Aromatherapist wishing to work with an animal client first discuss with the animal’s owner what veterinary therapy has already taken place and the Vet’s diagnoses. The best case scenario is to have the clients Vet give their blessing for trying an alternative complimentary therapy, plus make it very clear that you are not a Vet and can not legally or professionally offer any diagnoses or treatment on the animals health.

Contacting Veterinarians in your area and engaging in a “relaxed” educational and descriptive discussion of what your services can do for the animal industry and how you apply your “complimentary” therapy would be a definite professional courtesy. It will hopefully aid in open communication on all levels and possibly make for our acceptance into Animal Complimentary Aromatherapy treatments on a Provincial and National level easier. Mind you the chance of running into a Professional who is extremely disagreeable to any form of Alternative therapy is also very real. I have been fortunate in my work so far, to deal with Vets who either accept it with open arms or feel it is “hogwash” and if the client wishes to “waste their money, then that is their business”.

In short, work with the Vet and not against them ~ we need them just as we need the MDs in the human world. They understand the medical condition / history of the animal client and may enlighten you to any contradictions with medication or current treatments. I believe these steps will help make the Veterinarians aware of this new/old alternative complimentary therapy, as well as hopefully prevent any malpractice suits. By being respectful of each others field of training, education and working together we can offer better stronger health and wellness system for all, with out stealing any one professions sunshine.

I hope this helps all Aromatherapists who currently work in this area or would like to start. I would also encourage any Aromatherapist who does work with animals or wishes to, learn as much about the animal physiology and body mechanics as you can. Their bodies are different then ours not only in size but also in internal and external physical make up. (*Animals are far more sensitive to essential oils then us and require weaker blends, plus they can have adverse reactions to different EO’s that are safe for humans*). Remember, our training does not qualify us to act as a Medical Doctor or Doctor of Veterinarian medicine.

In hindsight after writing this article and discussing some of these issues with Caroline Ingraham (*Caroline Ingraham is recognized world-wide as the leading expert on using aromatics with animals*), I can see that this is not just a local issue but an international one that we are just scratching the surface of. Animal aromatherapy encompasses a whole new area of education and training that should not be taken lightly. As with our work in laying the foundation for Aromatherapy in the human world, we have the same issues and responsibility to future generations of professionals who wish to work in the animal world.

In reviewing this article Caroline once again stressed to me that as an Aromatherapist, *“We are not allowed to 'practice, diagnose or treat', but we can teach animal owners how to look after their animals with essential oils and other secondary compounds. It is all about wording what one is doing correctly to then be working within the law.”*

Currently I know of no recognized Aromatherapy schools that deal with applications for animals in Canada. To my knowledge the best-known schools for animal aromatherapy are through Caroline Ingraham in the UK and Catherine Bird in Australia.

Holly Schuurman
Morquito Ranch Aromatherapy

Holly Schuurman is a Professional Aromatherapist residing in Central Alberta and a current professional member of the AAPA. She is a graduate of the West Coast Institute of Aromatherapy and a student of Cathrine Bird's "Equine Aromatherapy Course". Her Equine education consists of 27 years of working, breeding and competing with horses on both Provincial and National levels. She has been using Essential Oils and Aromatherapy techniques on horses since 2000.

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