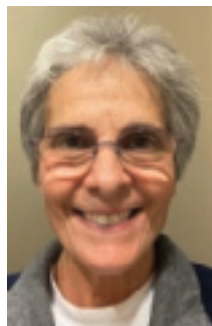


## Integrative therapies you need to know

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Horse owners and trainers often use integrative—or even their own—therapies to try to maintain their horses' wellbeing and/or improve performance. Many times, they do so without input from or the knowledge of their primary care veterinarian. These therapies can include a multitude of oral, manual, and even injectable entities, some of which can truly be classified as complementary, alternative, and integrative veterinary medicine (CAVM) therapies.

The AVMA 2019 Model Veterinary Practice Act (MVPA) defines CAVM therapies as: “a heterogeneous group of preventive, diagnostic, and therapeutic philosophies and practices that are not considered part of conventional (Western) medicine as practiced by most veterinarians and veterinary technicians/technologists. These therapies include, but are not limited to, veterinary acupuncture, acupressure, and acupressure; veterinary homeopathy; veterinary manual or manipulative therapy (i.e., therapies based on techniques practiced in osteopathy and chiropractic medicine); veterinary nutraceutical therapy; and veterinary phytotherapy.”

Integrative/complementary therapies are popular with horse owners, but as was reported in the July 9, 2021, post in *The Horse* by Christa Leste-Lasserre, MA, regarding Dr. Annelies Decloedt's survey of more than 1,500 horse owners, 25% of the survey respondents who use CAVM do not mention to their veterinarians that they are utilizing these therapies. This survey also revealed that of the 1,532 respondents, 73% had used CAVM, of which 65% were manual therapies and approximately 55% herbals, 50% homeopathy and 33% therapies such as water treadmills and/or acupuncture. (Read the post at [thehorse.com/1101725/complementary-therapies-popular-but-sometimes-lack-veterinary-collaboration](http://thehorse.com/1101725/complementary-therapies-popular-but-sometimes-lack-veterinary-collaboration)).

The article, “A Survey Examining Attitudes Towards Equine Complementary Therapies for the Treatment of Musculoskeletal Injuries” (Thirkell, J; Hyland, R; *Journal of Equine Veterinary Science*, Vol. 59, Dec. 2017, p 82-87) reported similar percentages, with 81% of the respondents reporting that they would try therapies without consulting their primary care veterinarian. To me, this behavior could reflect that owners may not be aware how integrative therapies may actually interact with the overall health care of a horse and that veterinarians are commonly aware of and trained in integrative therapies.

The primary care veterinarian is the appropriate person to coordinate health care practices for their horse, but he/she needs to know all the therapies being employed.

Oftentimes, unknown to the people using these integrative therapies, if not employed properly and by properly trained professionals, there can be side effects and even interactions with conventional therapies that can be detrimental to the horse. Owners often begin integrative therapies for an issue before seeking veterinary advice or intervention which, if inappropriate to be used, may cause the condition being addressed to worsen and delay appropriate treatment and therapy. Therefore, it is very important for the horse's primary care veterinarian to be aware of all therapies being used. This is another example of the importance of having a robust veterinarian-client-patient relationship. Communication and history-taking should include having the horse's owner, trainer or caretaker reveal all therapies being used or administered so that the veterinarian can evaluate fully how to proceed and treat.

As veterinarians, we all have been trained in conventional (Western) veterinary medical practices. Some of us have also sought additional training in integrative therapies. Personally, I prefer to use the term “integrative” rather than “complementary” (spell it wrong and it means free) or “alternative.” I don't believe these therapies are necessarily an alternative to or that they replace our traditional, conventional veterinary therapies, but rather can be integrated appropriately with conventional therapies to add to the care we can provide as indicated.

Most veterinary practice acts include integrative therapies in the definition of the practice of veterinary medicine. According to the AVMA 2019 MVPA, the “Practice of veterinary medicine” means: To diagnose, prognose, treat, correct, change, alleviate, or prevent animal disease, illness, pain, deformity, defect, injury, or other physical, dental, or mental conditions by any method or mode; including the: ... use of complementary, alternative, and integrative therapies,...” As such, it is then the responsibility and duty of the primary care veterinarian to be able to provide or properly recommend appropriate integrative therapies, especially when the client is inquiring about such therapies; or when gathering patient history, the veterinarian discovers that integrative therapies are being used.

While not every veterinarian chooses or may be able to be trained in integrative therapies, it is important that all veterinarians be familiar with the therapies available. This way, when clients are searching for additional possible treatments or preventative care, the primary care

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