

## Barriers to Hybrid Models Going Up in Smoke

A mere twenty years ago, Bill Clinton compelled to defend his marijuana experimentation with the famous phrase “I didn’t inhale.” Fast forward to the present, and marijuana is sold openly in licensed businesses as medication. Obama has joked “I inhaled frequently. That was the point.”

Actually, the bigger point is that times change. Public perception and attitudes are always evolving, and successful businesses perceive these changes and adapt. One growing trend in veterinary medicine is the rise of “hybrid models” that incorporate traditional Chinese techniques, such as acupuncture and herbal medicine, into Western allopathic practices.

In the 1990’s, after taking the requisite courses at the Chi Institute, I began offering acupuncture to my veterinary clients. I had personally witnessed miraculous pain control in dogs after acupuncture therapy, and practiced it on my own dog for his debilitating arthritis. I was well-trained in the techniques, and I was a believer, yet my hybrid model foundered. A close friend experienced similar problems with his hybrid practice, despite trying valiantly for years to incorporate acupuncture and herbalism into his allopathic practice.

We ultimately concluded that clients simply were not ready for the cost and novelty of Chinese medicine. It was all too unfamiliar, and was perceived as expensive hocus-pocus. Although I could explain and demonstrate the techniques, it didn’t pay to sit and take the time necessary to alleviate their doubt.

But just like medical marijuana, times have changed, and hybrid models are all the rage. Dr. Gerry identifies the main reason why: “One of the reasons we started offering both modalities was demand. Clients today are looking for alternatives to medications they perceive as toxic, or for something additional to extend the comfort and wellbeing of their pet’s life. They will travel great distances to find this type of care.”

Today’s pet owners are more fluent with the concepts of complementary techniques like acupuncture. They understand what acupuncture is, and the types of problems it is likely to help alleviate. Many have heard about the benefits of acupuncture from friends and family, or have tried it themselves. As their veterinarian, it takes relatively little time and effort to inform them about Chinese medicine and to agree on a treatment plan. “Good client communication has always been one of the driving principles in the practice. Through this communication, clients and doctors identify the needs of the patient, discuss the tools and make agreements as to the process. This includes prices, time lines and expected therapeutic results,” says Dr. Gregory Todd about his successful hybrid practice.

If you have been thinking about building complementary techniques into your practice, now is the right time to do it. Look for courses at the Chi Institute to get your training, and begin marketing your practice’s new offerings. Consider remodeling your physical space to enhance client perceptions. “One of the most important things to consider when designing this sort of hybrid practice is to walk the walk. If you want to really expand wellness care and provide alternative services, then provide the kind of healing environment that makes this possible,” says architect Heather Lewis.

And if you become interested in herbalism, keep on the lookout for trends in cannabis therapy. It’s being practiced in humans, so who’s going to be the vet to offer it in animals? (You heard it here first!)

Other quotes:

“Also, I found that adding Traditional Medicine to my conventional practice sharpened my conventional skills and raised the bar on the standard of practice for me.” Gregory Todd, DVM

“My goal has always been to provide the best possible tools for my patients and clients to help keep them healthy. The deeper your tool chest the better your results. I feel that conventional diagnostics can provide great insight into how to better treat our patients. Also as a practitioner, I reach for the Traditional Medicine tools of diet, herbs, and acupuncture first. I do feel , however, that there are times when drugs and surgery are the best tools to handle an acute crisis or problem.” Gregory Todd, DVM