

Adapting Family Integrative Healing Techniques to a Veterinarian Environment

A Special Interview With Dr. Allison Brown

By Dr. Karen Shaw Becker

Dr. Karen Becker:

Hi, I'm Dr. Karen Becker, and I'm so excited that Wade has nominated Dr. Allison Brown for a Game Changer award. We have Dr. Brown with us today to talk more about the wonderful work she's doing. So, Dr. Brown, congratulations on your Game Changer award, and thanks for spending some time with me today to talk about your work.

Dr. Allison Brown:

Thank you, Dr. Becker. It's wonderful to join and meet you. I'm very, very excited, and thank you to Wade, I appreciate this.

Dr. Karen Becker:

So wonderful. So, Dr. Brown, obviously you have a heart for animals, you're a veterinarian, but you clearly have gone on to learn a ton more than when you graduated from vet school. So if you'll just walk our readers and listeners through your evolution of becoming a doctor, but then also maybe expanding your toolbox, that's a great place to start.

Dr. Allison Brown:

Sure. I'm currently an integrative veterinarian in Staten Island, New York. I started in this building where I am at work right now. In 1995, I had a mentor who was wonderful and encouraged me to go to veterinary school, so I did, and I had a wonderful opportunity. I went to Ross University, I graduated in 2005.

Since then, I had practiced conventional medicine and along my journey I got married and I had children. Ironically, one of my children became very ill when he was a toddler, and allopathic and conventional medicine just wasn't cutting it, so I ended up seeking out a board-certified pediatrician who was practicing homeopathy and holistic medicine, integrative medicine, and we ended up having this crazy journey of transforming our entire life. He changed my family's life.

My son got better over time. Did take some time, but nutritional changes, lifestyle changes, lots of supplements, and over time he was so much better. He had some chronic respiratory issues, so I had kind of like an "Aha" moment and I said, "If I can do this and heal my family, I can certainly do this for my patients."

Because at the time, this was back in 2012, 2013, and I said, "I'm not satisfied and I'm a little frustrated, and I can't help the way I want to intuitively help my patients and my owners, my clients." So, that's what really opened the door, and it was human medicine that just changed my life and I integrated that into my veterinary practice every day.

Dr. Karen Becker:

Your story gave me the chills, in that I think with our biological offspring, mamas will do whatever it takes. Whatever it takes. That's your primal instincts of, okay, you may have been introduced to some forms of holistic medicine or have heard about it in that gap between your son getting sick and you discovering integrative medicine, but I think desperation oftentimes drives us to investigate modalities that maybe we were not open to before.

Certainly, in your situation where you literally had living loving proof of options beyond what you knew helping your family, that is a transformative experience. So, then did you go back then to veterinary medicine? First of all, what was your team, your colleagues' response to you wanting to shift to more of a do-no-harm approach first? And what have your clients' responses been?

Dr. Allison Brown:

Well, I co-own this practice with my husband and he saw the transformation with our son. As a conventional veterinarian himself, he was very open to "Let's try things, let's do things," and we did, and then transferring that into our veterinary practice has really only made it so that there are other options.

Dr. Karen Becker:

Yeah.

Dr. Allison Brown:

Our clients really just don't know enough, and I didn't know enough. When I went to my pediatrician, I knew very little, so I love to educate and I love to tell them, say, "Listen, this is what I did for my family." I have truly learned that unless we do it for ourselves, we really cannot help our patients. We really, really have to take our mental health seriously, we have to take our well-being seriously. Movement is medicine. I've always said that, and it is really important that we keep ourselves at the forefront and we love ourselves. Self-love is really, really important, especially in veterinary medicine.

So, when I started incorporating that here, some people said, "Well, I don't want to really change the diet right now, or I don't want to add this or add that." I gave them time, and really, it's just with education, persistence and a little bit of time and tender love and care of ourselves and our clients, and they come around. They really do come around and they start to see the difference.

One thing at a time. I can't change everything at once, but one thing at a time, very slow implementation. Usually, the first thing I do is I start with nutrition, basic things. Always making sure that I understand that finances are always an issue, so I start with little things like add some vegetables here or add a little bit of protein to kibble, and then a year later we're on freeze-dried or raw food. So, I really feel that once I tell my story to my clients and let them know that it's totally doable, I've transformed our family, we have, my husband and myself, and it's doable, most people are really open to change.

Dr. Karen Becker:

Well, and you are [a] living, breathing, visible testimony to you having a transformed personal life and your family's life has been transformed, because you have educated yourself enough to be able to make better decisions. That's exactly what I think our role as co-creators of health with our patients. We want to partner with our clients to let them know we have things to offer you, but we're going to go at a pace that resonates with you. Because, really, the owners, the guardians of our blessedds are the ones driving the bus. They get to make the decisions, they're in charge of creating health.

Dr. Allison Brown:

Yes.

Dr. Karen Becker:

Our job is to walk alongside them answering questions and supporting them, but at a pace that works for them. It sounds like you have just allowed your clients to step into your more multimodal open-minded practice at a pace that resonates with them, and it's so beautiful.

Wade, the lovely gentleman that submitted your name for a Game Changer, he talks about his German Shepherd, that he didn't want to have epulis, he didn't want to have this proliferative oral tissue removed surgically, and that he just wanted to try this maybe nonsurgical approach that he couldn't find anywhere else. What he said was you were the only doctor that would even entertain the idea of approaching this non-surgically.

That has to be such a refreshing breath for all of your clients to be able to say, "Listen, surgery's always an option, but let's try these things first." That has to be so incredibly rewarding for your clients, but let's talk about you in the morning when you get up. What do you love most about what you do?

Dr. Allison Brown:

I think what I love most is really the connections that I make with my clients, the longstanding connections. I have clients that I've been seeing for many years and I have truly understood from evaluating the home life, and I've seen so many of my patients have same or similar illnesses to their owners. So, hypothyroidism or cardiac illness or renal disease, whatever it is, someone in the house is suffering from a similar illness.

So, I started looking into the energetics of the home and how that can play a role in how our pets are just sponges and they absorb our energy, and they really do reflect sometimes the chaos that can be going on in our homes, including myself. So, I started focusing on that, and I really enjoy transforming not only my patients' lives, but my owners' also.

If they need resources, I am happy to say, "This is our local nutritionist that we have. Why don't you make an appointment? Or make sure you get your meat from our local butcher and support our local butcher or our farmers market." So, I really like to tell people what I do. Yoga and running and all the things that I love to do for myself, I really like to share that with them, and then we just build. The relationship grows and it just becomes a family, because this is a family practice, really.

Dr. Karen Becker:

Gosh, I just love everything about this. I oftentimes say health travels up the leash-

Dr. Allison Brown:

Yes.

Dr. Karen Becker:

-in that sometimes we don't love ourselves enough to take care of ourselves, but we love our animals more than anything. So, when people see the transformation that occurs in their animals and they think, "Gosh, I wonder if this is possible for me in my life, my health, my well-being, my home."

You're like a coordinator, you're a microepidemiologist inside the home maybe sleuthing out and doing a little bit of identification of variables that are affecting the health of the whole home. What an awesome resource your clients have in that not only have you been through that, but by intentionally improving the health of one member of the family, be it a dog or cat, the end result is oftentimes overall well-being. The level of health and the home increases for everyone. You have to see that over and over, that has to be incredibly gratifying for you.

Dr. Allison Brown:

Yes. It really is, because when I see someone say, "Oh, wow, I never thought of it that way, or I'm going to try this," or when I see a follow-up appointment and I see the changes and I can tangibly see that the patient looks so much better and the owner is so happy and they feel better and they've implemented some change, it really is inexpressible. I mean, I just can't tell you how happy and gratifying it is to be able to contribute to society that way.

Dr. Karen Becker:

I can see from all that you are doing, you one of the, I'm going to say, rarer veterinarians that will never burn out, because you've diversified your practice enough to be able to know what it takes to care for your own well-being, emotional, physical, spiritual wellbeing, but also all of your extended family in the form of your practice, which is also a breath of fresh air for our profession. It's beautiful.

I have to assume you're wildly busy, potentially with a long waiting list of clients, because I can only imagine everyone in your area once they hear your approach, they're very interested in working with someone that has this approach. Allison, do you do any consultation for people that are outside your area, or are you busy enough with your local clients that you don't do telemedicine?

Dr. Allison Brown:

We do. I don't do it as often as I would like, but I do have people that come to travel to this practice to see myself and the other doctors, but I think that it's something that we're definitely working on. I'm still trying to balance, like every veterinarian, being a mom and taking care of myself and my patients.

So that balance, as you know, I'm sure, is difficult at times and we are busy, but I do try to make it so that everyone knows that we are human and we have to take care of ourselves. But everyone that comes in our practice, we really try to make them feel like family, because that's how we feel. Taking care of family just means that sometimes you're going to be exhausted, but tomorrow you might be more energetic, but every day is going to be okay, you are going to be okay. Taking one step at a time and realizing that there's never an end.

I think that's what I love the most as far as what I would recommend to any veterinarians that are struggling. There really is never, "I can't do anything else for you," there's always something else to do, and it's just about obtaining that knowledge and asking.

I have a wonderful support system of veterinarians that I reach out to all the time. Holistic, homeopathic, conventional, nutritionist, I mean, you name it, I try to talk to everyone. The more information that we gather, the better outcomes we will have, ultimately.

Dr. Karen Becker:

It's just awesome. If people wanted to learn more about what you do, your practice, maybe if they're in the area, Dr. Brown, maybe website, social media, where do people go to learn more about your practice?

Dr. Allison Brown:

Sure. We're on Facebook, we're on Instagram. Our website is DonganHillsVet.com. We are in Dongan Hills in Staten Island, New York, but, really, just calling us and connecting with our CSR (customer service representative) and we try to get you in as soon as we can. I see a lot of new clients that want to have an alternative approach, so the best way is just to reach out to us, and we'll definitely try to help you as best we can.

Dr. Karen Becker:

That's beautiful. If you could tell the world one thing, or if you could let the world know one thing from your heart, what would it be?

Dr. Allison Brown:

There's so many things, but I think if everyone knew for humanity and for our animals that nutrition is the key. It really is so vitally important that if you just focus on nutrition, many medicines are not needed ever. So, I feel like the body has a wonderful ability to heal itself, provided it receives what it needs.

Dr. Karen Becker:

Yeah.

Dr. Allison Brown:

There are so many resources out there for humans and animals, and most of our knowledge is always extrapolated from people, so that's why I focus so heavily on what we do and how we can implement that in our pets' lives. But I really think eating well is our salvation. I mean, that's where we're going to have a healthy life and a wonderful, wonderful experience and journey.

Dr. Karen Becker:

I am so incredibly thankful that Wade took the time to nominate you. What a beautiful thing you are doing in your family unit, in your extended family unit, for your clients, for your patients. You're [a] living light that the body is strong and resilient, and that recovery is possible, prevention would be better and easier, and you're laying out logical common sense steps in creating healthier animals. What a beautiful thing you're doing for your community and also our profession. Congratulations on your Game Changer award and what a delight it is to be able to spend some time with you.

Dr. Allison Brown:

Thank you, Dr. Becker. I really appreciate it. It's been great, thank you.