

Fostering a Collaborative Community of Veterinarians

A Special Interview With Dr. Jordan Kocen

By Dr. Karen Shaw Becker

Dr. Karen Becker:

I'm Dr. Karen Becker. And today I'm excited, I have Dr. Jordan Kocen with me. He has been nominated for a Game Changer award. Dave nominated him. And he's taking some time out of his very busy schedule to spend some time with us so that we all can learn more about the amazing practice that he has founded and set up, and he's currently running. So, thank you, Dr. Jordan for joining me, and congratulations on your Game Changer award.

Dr. Jordan Kocen:

Thanks. Thanks for inviting me. Happy to talk to you today.

Dr. Karen Becker:

We're so excited to learn more about the amazing work that you are doing. I had a minute to visit your website, I love everything about it because we're kind of two peas in a pod when it comes to how we practice and our approach to medicine. But for listeners and readers, who aren't familiar with your integrative, and very diversified animal hospital, would you walk us through a little bit about how and why you decided to become a veterinarian? And then, how and why you made the transition from what you learned in vet school to this diversified practitioner that you are now?

Dr. Jordan Kocen:

Well, like most vets, I started out as a general practitioner. And for myself, I mean, I always wanted to be a vet, so I don't have any other stories about that. I just always did. We had animals around the house. We lived out in the country, so I had some farm animal as pets also. And then, finally, getting into vet school was great. I liked school, so that worked out really well.

Started off for a couple of years, just doing general practice. And I had heard some lectures about acupuncture, and I thought it was intriguing. Then, I had an opportunity to take a course. I started using it. It worked really well. It turns out I was the first veterinarian in Northern Virginia, or the only vet in Northern Virginia doing acupuncture. So, people started coming from a bigger and bigger circle.

And then I had, again, opportunity to take a course on herbal medicine at a human acupuncture school, which is very interesting. Then a chance to take a course on homeopathy because it was nearby. You just have to keep the blinders open. These opportunities arise and you just never know. And I got busy enough that 90% of my day was people coming for holistic therapy. So, of course, I said, "I could do just this. There's plenty of great conventional vets in my area. I don't need to duplicate what they do."

And I left to join a specialty hospital, South Paws, that was just opening. And I was the holistic department for 10 years. They expanded and I had an associate, and together we were there for

the next 9 years. And six years ago, I decided yet again, the area could support a holistic center where we could offer more services.

So, I opened up the Veterinary Holistic Center in Springfield, Virginia, which is a suburb of DC. So, we are still there doing what we do. But we've got spaces for area vets and practitioners to come in. We have two massage therapists that come in as their schedule permits, two chiropractors that come in, we have an animal communicator, we have a Reiki practitioner. We still have open spaces, so if people do things, maybe not full time with us, all those folks have practices elsewhere. But by coming to us in the more suburban area, they could see a lot of folks in one day who can come to them and provide those other services. And that's really what we're doing.

We don't do any conventional medicine at our practice by our choice. Because, again, everyone has a good regular vet for their routine care, blood work, annual exams, whatever they're doing. And the other advantages with that, of course, is it frees us up to do what we do. And the regular vets, the primary care can see the improvements when they do the annual exams, when they do the rechecks, they see the blood values improving, they see the animals definitely moving better, the skin looks much better. So, it's not because I sent them a letter that said it's better. They've seen it themselves. So, that's been a wonderful evolution for our practice.

Dr. Karen Becker:

I love that. Did you think of that it's a very co-creative way to set up a practice? Did you come up with that on your own, or was it modeled for you? That's a really good way. And that also keeps for the conventional practitioners that understand what you do and see it, or when they have people asking this really works well because you're not competition to anyone, you're doing your own thing.

Dr. Jordan Kocen:

Right. The specialty hospital that I joined that's indeed how they set it up. It was several practices under one roof. As far as the public knew, it was one practice.

Dr. Karen Becker:

Right.

Dr. Jordan Kocen:

There's no friction, there's no reason. And there were different departments. They had surgery, medicine, everybody was doing their own thing. Sometimes sharing patients, sometimes individual. So, I might see some of the post-op cases maybe. Or if we saw someone that I felt could benefit from internal medicine, I would usually tell the clients, "Talk to your regular vet, who would they recommend? But we have good people here."

So, thinking along those lines, I don't need to control everybody. And I knew I was referring to the chiropractors and the massage therapists, but I couldn't keep up with their schedules. I didn't know their circle. So, I figured if we had a place for them to come to. And I reached out to a few people first, "If I did this, would you be interested?" And most of them were, "yes." We even

have one veterinarian now who has a house call acupuncture practice in Northern Virginia, and is with us a day and a half a week. So, that's a day and a half she doesn't have to drive around. But she can still do her house call. So, again, it has just worked out.

We've had a few people come and go. Some people, it hasn't worked out well for them. Others have stayed the entire time. Others have expanded their time. Perfectly fine. If it works for you, good. If it doesn't work for you, maybe you need to be someplace else, or do something else.

Dr. Karen Becker:

Wonderful. And really, also, for all of these therapists and practitioners, it allows the flexibility for them to come to a facility. And for clients, such a great service because all those services are under one roof. And that just improves job satisfaction, life satisfaction for everyone involved. It's really wonderful. I also saw that you do rehabilitation.

Dr. Jordan Kocen:

We have half of a rehab department right now. We have the underwater treadmill and someone who can run it. And I've had feelers out for a couple of different rehab people. That's another case where a few people have come and gone.

Dr. Karen Becker:

Sure.

Dr. Jordan Kocen:

And it's a matter of what they're looking for in their lives.

Dr. Karen Becker:

Sure.

Dr. Jordan Kocen:

And if it doesn't work. It's like, "Okay-"

Dr. Karen Becker:

Yeah. Yes.

Dr. Jordan Kocen:

The right person will be there when they're supposed to be there." And, again, it's just like the door is open for people to come in and use it. And, as you said earlier, I think we get a lot of respect from regular veterinarians because we don't do what they do. But we also don't discount what they do.

Dr. Karen Becker:

Exactly. You work together.

Dr. Jordan Kocen:

Yeah. We just explain to the clients, things like chronic skin disease, and chronic digestive stuff does not respond well to Western medicine. Your vet's done a great job with the tools they have. The problem is those tools just don't work well for those conditions. But it does work well in other cases. So, it's the right tool in the right situation.

Dr. Karen Becker:

And since you've set up your integrative facility, what's the vibe, what's the energy of – do you feel like you're building good working relationships with the conventional vets around you? Twenty years ago, sometimes there was palpable friction in Chicago when I set up the first proactive animal hospital, there was palpable friction. But I think that's going away.

And I feel like more and more veterinarians are recognizing, and actually feel relief that they have someplace to refer these chronic cases to, instead of being frustrated or confused about what we're doing. There has been a much more open-minded sense of relief. Are you experiencing that as well?

Dr. Jordan Kocen:

I think I've definitely seen it grown. And when I started over 20 years ago, myself, some vets were actually against it. Many were just ambivalent, they just didn't know. And there was a small percent that were open to it. But I didn't cater to the vet. I catered to the client and it was word of mouth for 15, 20 years because then the internet got going. And it's still mostly word of mouth. But I will say, as time has gone on, we get more direct referrals from the primary care vet and we get, what I call, a passive referral. Meaning if the client says to their vet, "What do you think about holistic therapy? What do you think about acupuncture?" Nowadays, I think the answer would be, "We don't do it, but we know some people who do."

Dr. Karen Becker:

Yes.

Dr. Jordan Kocen:

"And we trust them. And these are people you could go to." That includes us, but it includes a few other folks in the area that are providing the services, too. Since that's all we do, many clients come to us because they know that's all we do. And if you're looking for something a little bit different, it's going to be in our building. If you think about it, your regular practice wouldn't have a Reiki practitioner usually. We would have that. If someone got Reiki for themselves, they'd look for us. If they've gotten chiropractic, they will call a lot for appointments for the chiropractor for their pet because they've had chiropractic and it's worked well for them. And our chiropractors are both also certified in acupuncture so they can offer that as well.

But, again, if it's something that we don't offer, we're happy to recommend a specialty hospital in the area, or a few things we don't offer a few of the other folks offering alternative therapies may do ozone therapy, or something else. We don't, but I have a list of the people who do-

Dr. Karen Becker:

Yeah.

Dr. Jordan Kocen:

-and if that's what you're looking for, I'm happy to give you their name, and they can look into it from there.

Dr. Karen Becker:

This is where collaboration, when we put the patient in the center of care, where we all can contribute what resonates with us, what we're capable of, what we're good at. But in supporting our patients with all of those other options around us, it really helps build a strong network of professionals that also end up being able to work well together year, after year, after year. So, it's wonderful.

What you're establishing there is really good in terms of long-term care. And all of these professionals working together to intentionally focus and improve the health and well-being of that patient. And it's really healthy. And the animals in your area are lucky critters because that circle of support is not available nationwide, as you know.

When you get up in the morning, Jordan, what do you love most about the work that you do?

Dr. Jordan Kocen:

I just like working with the animals we work with. And I think of a student who came to observe with us once. And at the end of her two or three days, she says, "I just couldn't do what you do. You see too many old animals." And I said, "That's true. But think of all the good we do for those older animals."

Dr. Karen Becker:

Yes.

Dr. Jordan Kocen:

So, people come all the time, they want a couple of weeks of quality time. Maybe we can get to Christmas. Next thing you know, we're two years up the road. Or they've had just chronic problems back and forth to the veterinarian, maybe with diagnostics, different medications, and it's just not quite getting at it. So, when they come in, we take some time and educate them about the more holistic approach, and listen to the story. And I explain your vet has done a good job. And I have the advantage of hearing the progression of the problem because that tells us an awful lot of what works, what doesn't work, where it really started, and laying some of that out.

We do a little bit of Chinese medicine theory for people to the degree that they're interested in that, or homeopathy theory. But always that holistic, explaining you have to take two steps back, and look at the whole picture of your pet. How are they feeling? How are they doing? We ask questions about where do they spend their time in the house? Who do they spend their time with? All these things. I explain to clients it's not good or bad, but it's a part of who they are. And it often, helps us determine the best way to treat. And I think clients appreciate that. And we like getting that feedback from the clients as well.

Again, the regular vets in my area are not my client. The clients are my clients. And they appreciate the collaboration, as you said, and they come with the next pet, and the next pet. And they'll say, "What's the earliest we can come with the dog for acupuncture?" Or, "When should we start?" And we always say, give us a call, describe the problem. And we'll tell you any problem, even along the way, should we see it? Should your veterinarian see it? Should you go to the emergency clinic? What should you do with that? And when should we intervene.

Sometimes it's better to let the dust settle on an emergent case, and then we can best decide. We don't need to micromanage. We don't have to fix every little problem. We're looking to see where is it coming from? And if we can pinpoint that, and direct therapy there then, everything that emanates from that will start to improve. It's limited only by the dog or the cat's ability to get better. And I tell clients that too, and they appreciate it, laying it out that way in a very realistic, helpful way.

Dr. Karen Becker:

So, I mean, that's the beautiful piece about holistic medicine is that, as a practitioner, you're able to give them that whole picture that probably has not been presented before in a way that they can see all of those dots needing to be connected when it comes to fully supporting that animal and healing response. So, that's wonderful. And it sounds like you're an incredibly busy human, but you get up every day excited and motivated to do what you do, which is also really, really good.

Dr. Jordan Kocen:

Right. We love it when the dogs, and even some of the cats. So, the dogs are happy to run into the clinic.

Dr. Karen Becker:

Yes.

Dr. Jordan Kocen:

And the clients say, "They don't do this at the regular vet usually." You get a few dogs that, it's a golden retriever, they love everybody maybe. But some of the others after a visited two, they feel better, nothing harmful, or hurtful happened to them. The receptionist seemed to greet them by name. They seem to know everybody. It's almost like a big party out there sometimes. I got to rope them in to get them in the exam room sometimes, which is great.

So, the clients like that, the pets like that, everybody is relaxed. Our exam rooms are a little larger than sometimes the general practice because we need that space for everybody to just have space. We've got a carpet on the floor. We've got comfortable chairs, none of the plastic chairs, or church pews, which were all the rage in the 1980s. So, it's just a comfortable space, I think. Calm colors.

Our clinic is set up with the five element themes so each exam room's a different color. And everybody kind of picks the rooms that they seem to be most comfortable with. So that environment, the clients comment on that a lot. "Hey, where'd you get this floor? This is a great

color. Where'd you get this?" So, that says a lot also about making us feel good about what we're doing.

Dr. Karen Becker:

Yeah, it's wonderful. If you could tell the world one thing, or if you would want the world to know one thing, Jordan, what would it be?

Dr. Jordan Kocen:

I work really hard, I think, to tell people what we are doing. These alternative therapies are not anything to be afraid of. We should be integrating medicine because it's all medicine. I love speaking with veterinarians. I love speaking to the general public. Just to, again, put them at ease, and explain integrating these therapies into your practice whether you do it, you hire an associate, open up to the people in your town that are doing some. Or even if they're a little further away, find out. I tell holistic vets, please contact the regular vets in your area. Let them know what you're doing. It's not competition.

The addition of alternative therapies, my term I like to use is it's an evolution, not a revolution. It's not us against them. It's like be a good vet, which means any tools available that you can offer, know your limits, know your therapies. And I really work hard to tell everybody, "Just take a breath. Calm down, it's all okay." So, that's been my message. And we do it through the animals, and we do it through lectures when possible, and speaking to the public. And we do a lot of local events, just neighborhood events that they do around here, and just put our tent up and sit back and answer questions. And it really helps people be comfortable.

Dr. Karen Becker:

That's beautiful. What you are doing is you're building bridges. You're building bridges to other vets that are tentative, afraid, confused, put off communication, starting a discussion that allows people to get their questions answered. But also, to be able to have a dialogue with someone is oftentimes, all it needs for that communication to be open. And once that happens, then you have a means of being able to have an ongoing conversation.

So, good for you for building bridges everywhere you go. It's the most powerful way to not just build relationships but, ultimately, for you to be able to impact the health and wellness of the animals around you is because you're talking about it, which is awesome.

Dr. Jordan Kocen:

Right.

Dr. Karen Becker:

If people wanted to learn more about your practice, and what you do, where would they go?

Dr. Jordan Kocen:

I think it's when they come to our website, which is V-H-C-N-O-V-A because we're the Veterinary Holistic Center in Northern Virginia. So, VHCNoVa.com. Poke around a little bit. We don't have a fold-out website with blogs and a lot of things. I keep hoping to, but we're so busy in practice I don't have time to do that, which is fine. My goal is to treat patients, help

people.

One of these days we'll add more of that, but we certainly can put people in the right direction. Let 'em know what we're doing. We've got a short resource list with just a list of a couple of books that I think lay out these concepts very well for the general public, Dr. Allen Schoen, Dr. Cheryl Schwartz, Dr. Marty Goldstein, Dr. Richard Pitcairn, all the people who did a lot of these things, got most of us started when they were our teachers. Just wonderful folks who have opened up their doors for us. And I'm happy to put people in touch with their words because then the clients learn more. Then they help me because they know what I need to know, and bring the information. And then, they tell their friends, and it just spreads because it works.

Dr. Karen Becker:

It's really good. I am so thankful that your client, Dave, took the time to nominate you for a Game Changer award. It's been wonderful getting to know more about the modalities that you're using, and the way that you're knitting together your community to be able to have better understanding of each person's vital role, each professional's vital role in caring for the animals that we so dearly love. So, thank you for everything that you're doing.

Dr. Jordan Kocen:

Thanks for having me. Appreciate it.