

A Special Interview with Dr. Barbara Royal

By Dr. Karen Becker

KB: Dr. Karen Becker

BR: Dr. Barbara Royal

Introduction:

KB: Hi, this is Dr. Karen Becker, and today we have a very special guest, Dr. Barbara Royal. Dr. Royal is a holistic veterinarian that practices small animal medicine and rehabilitation therapy in Chicago. She's an author, and she is a board member of the American Holistic Veterinary Medical Foundation. Welcome, Dr. Royal.

BR: Thank you. It's nice to be here.

KB: I have several questions for you. This is your second time here.

BR: Yes. It's so exciting.

KB: It's very exciting. Thank you for coming back. I have a couple of questions about... As holistic practitioners, we have people that will oftentimes say, "Why? Why do you need holistic medicine? We have traditional medicine, and it's okay to have some options. But why do we really need alternative modalities available to people?"

BR: I think the main thing is that medicine in general doesn't complete our education in a holistic way.

KB: Yeah.

BR: We learn an awful lot about surgery, an awful lot about medications, and a lot about diseases, but we don't really learn about what are the causes of health.

KB: Yeah.

BR: And I think integrative medicine really helps us focus a little bit more on how to support health before you even get to disease.

KB: That's true. The concept of wellness. I don't know about you. But in veterinary school, they didn't even bring it up.

BR: Never.

KB: It was never even mentioned, the concept of how to allow the body to thrive or continue wellness. It was about how to treat disease.

BR: Yes.

KB: What do you... When you think about integrative medicine, you'll have some skeptics say that there are risks involved. And of course, from our perspective, there are significant risks with traditional veterinary medicine.

BR: Right.

KB: How would you answer people that are leery or concerned about there being risks with holistic or alternative medicine?

BR: Really, I just say, "Listen." My first thought when I have a client come in – and they seem to, you know, just be a little resistant (but they're sort of desperate, so they're coming anyway) – is if I can make sense to them... If it makes sense to you in your core, and you can say, "Okay, I understand what you're saying," that's the first hurdle.

KB: Yeah.

BR: Because a lot of what we do in holistic medicine and alternative medicine tends to make a little bit more sense. You can discuss the body as a whole. There's oftentimes in regular medicine where it's sort of, "Take this drug, but we don't really know how it works. Good luck."

KB: Right.

BR: That kind of risk I don't think is as acceptable as being able to say, you know, "Here's something I'm going to do. I'm going to help support the immune system. We're going to do these few things. We're going to have some basics of the foundations of health that have made sense for thousands of years." And you're going to want to do that.

KB: Yeah. And I think for a lot of people, even though they don't have maybe any background in integrative medicine, there's a resonance with just almost common sense principles when it comes to helping the body unlock its own ability to heal and thrive. There's a common sense principle that is oftentimes overlooked for hardcore science. We forget that the body knows what to do when it's given an opportunity.

BR: Right. That's a concept that I talk about a lot. It's sort of the wild health idea. It's what we've always done. We've had this basis of nutrition, reasonable amount of exercise (sort of the struggle that makes you strong), and then not overdoing things that could cause you harm.

KB: Yeah.

BR: So, as far as even medications or certain types of food. You know, when you're out in the world, and you're choosing, you tend to, you know. It's like with me. If I eat a candy bar, I sort of don't want another one.

KB: Right.

BR: But that's the idea. It's don't do anything to excess, and don't give yourself things that are going to cause you some trouble.

KB: Yeah. It makes perfect sense. From an integrative standpoint, could you offer our listeners maybe the top three health benefits from an integrative perspective as what you would suggest in terms of overall health tips or care ideas and thoughts?

BR: Yeah. My feeling is sort of look again for the foundations of health. So, what are the things that are going to keep an animal healthy in your house? The first thing is nutrition. The most important health decision, I think, every owner makes is what they put in the food bowl. And so, being sure that you're paying attention, and you're not saying, "Oh, I feed something that says 'Dog food,' but I don't know what's in it."

If you can start there and make sure that you're feeding... If you have a carnivore in your house, and it's a dog or a cat, then you're going to be feeding biologically appropriate food for that animal, which is mostly protein, a good amount of fat, and then a little bit of carbohydrates. That sort of starts out the foundations of health that the body knows what to do with.

KB: Yeah.

BR: Probably the next thing would then be to focus on exercise. Exercise is not just for the body, but for the mind. You need both of those things.

If you're thinking about a dog (I mean, one of their favorite things is smell), make sure you're going a little different route when you take your walks, and thinking of other things that you can do to interest them, as well as giving them things where.... If you're always walking on sidewalks, eventually that's all they'll be able to do. Make sure that you're taking them in places where they're challenging their body ... even if it's just tree roots, up a driveway, on gravel, and different things like that, that can make a big, big difference.

The same thing with a cat. If you can play with them, get them up and down on things, don't let them go just from the couch to the food bowl, and back again. The same thing with stimulation, they like to have things to think about.

And then the third thing I'd say is be careful not to overmedicate or to do too much that's going to be, you know, countering the body's own health. Don't overvaccinate. Don't give medications just because you can. Try to think if they actually make sense.

KB: Yeah. Great suggestions. I think sometimes owners put such faith in their veterinarians, that when you say to them, "Why are you giving it?" They'll say, "I don't know. Because my vet said to."

BR: Right.

KB: So, really beginning to think about if your pet needs it or requires it. Is it optional? Or is it totally unnecessary? [For] you, as their guardian, it's a really important point to make.

BR: Yeah. Have a dialogue and make sure you realize that you are the advocate for your little silent companion there.

KB: Right.

BR: It's not being controversial or difficult. It's just saying, "I just need to have it explained to me, because I'm the only one who could really care for this animal."

KB: Yeah, excellent. Nutrition.

BR: My favorite.

KB: Yes, mine as well.

BR: It used to be my least favorite.

KB: Yeah. Well, sure, probably if you're like myself, graduating from vet school. I started feeding raw food in vet school and made enemies with all of my professors, because they said, "You know, when you kill your dog, you're going to be sorry."

BR: Yes.

KB: But my education coming out of vet school for "traditional nutrition" was provided by one of the major pet food companies. Being that that's the majority of us, why is it our passion as holistic veterinarians? And why is there this kind of gaping hole with traditional veterinarians really addressing functional nutrition?

BR: It's just one of those things that medicine in general seems to forget. It seems to be sort of the lost part of health.

KB: Yeah.

BR: I think it's in human medicine. I think it's in veterinary medicine. And I think it's a huge problem. So, we focus again more on things that we can treat. What is the disease? And what's the medication or the surgery that treats that? And I think it's because it's a little bit founded in who's doing the research and who's putting the money into the research.

KB: Yeah.

BR: Are you going to research something that's been known for thousands of years that no one's really going to be putting money into and making money off of?

KB: Yup.

BR: Or you're going to be researching the new and latest drug for the next, you know, cardiology problem or whatever your next disease is? That's going to be much more likely in the forefront. Those are the classes that you'll see.

KB: And you know what's a little bit frustrating along the same veins of research is that some things, in my opinion, are common sense. Like to argue that a dog is a carnivore would be something... That would be worthless research.

BR: Right.

KB: And yet at this point, don't you feel like...

BR: Yes.

KB: We almost need to, you know.

BR: Prove it again.

KB: Exactly. We have to prove logic.

BR: Yes.

KB: And proving that...

BR: And we have to have money for that.

KB: I was just going to say, millions. It's a million dollars.

BR: Yes.

KB: If you're going to do a double-blind, placebo-controlled study, it's a million bucks.

BR: Right.

KB: So, I think part of the big issue with the major dog and cat food companies is being able to say, "We have the researchable data about our food." And then the "other" kind of common sense category: although we are working on creating excellent research projects, they're not there yet because of funding.

BR: Funding. I mean, that's the biggest problem right now.

KB: Yeah.

BR: Which is one of the things we're really working on.

KB: Right.

BR: The American Holistic Veterinary Medical Foundation is trying to develop a huge sort of a war chest of funding.

KB: Yes.

BR: So that we can provide when someone says, "I've got this great idea that we can research. Is raw food safer?"

KB: Sure, healthier.

BR: "Than kibble food?"

KB: Right.

BR: "Is it healthier than kibble food? Does it pose any huge risks?"

KB: Yup.

BR: We need somebody to actually sort of prove that for the scientific community, even though for me...

KB: Right.

BR: I know. It's 15 years. I've been watching raw food feed animals into health for 15 years.

KB: Well, if you look at the wildlife community, they've been doing it for millions of years.

BR: Without thinking about it.

KB: Without thinking about it and needing a research.

BR: With no study.

KB: However, you know, research is good.

BR: That's how we are.

KB: Yup. We're thankful that it's available. And we're working toward funding that now in a way that we believe allows us to support our viewpoints in how animals should be fed.

BR: And it supports our profession.

KB: Yup.

BR: I think the scientific basis of medicine has changed, affected, and improved medicine in a lot of ways. It's just... It's also sort of keeping certain things at bay, which we need in helping improve our integrative stance in the scientific community.

KB: Yeah. Exactly. And that's exactly what this fundraiser is about. It's being able to raise money to fund these projects that are really important for us to be able to validate what we do and why we do it. You bet.

So, "dog food" and "cat food." You and I are both confronted with people that say, "I'm nervous about feeding raw food," or "My vet says I have to feed this prescription diet or dry food." Talk to me about some of the ingredients in "pet foods" in general that actually could act more as a hindrance to health and well-being, versus an overall aid to improving or unlocking well-being.

BR: When you're talking about a carnivore, one of the most important things that we see is trying to get a diet that's an anti-inflammatory diet. One of the things we see as a major underlying problem for animals when they have health problems is inflammation.

KB: Yup.

BR: So, if you are feeding food that the body knows what to do with, you're going to have less inflammation, because the body's not reacting to something it's unfamiliar with.

KB: Yup.

BR: So, corn and wheat are probably the top two that I try to keep out of diets, because I think those are two ingredients that the body is a) not familiar with, and b) they're inflammatory.

KB: Right.

BR: And we know this in human medicine as well.

KB: Yeah.

BR: Those are really big ones. And then there are other ingredients that are sort of... They're not listed on the label, because they are byproducts of processing. You'll have high-heat-processed kibble, which will create a heterocyclic amine or an acrylamide.

KB: Right.

BR: And those are two potent carcinogens.

KB: Yeah. People don't understand they're all glycotoxin. People say, "You know, this is really healthy kibble," but it's been heated at temperatures to the point that people don't realize that these glycotoxins end up creating massive inflammation.

BR: Yes.

KB: Which, of course, is the big reason why we have overall degeneration in health for humans and for pets.

BR: Right. And this is science. I mean, you know, again, for me, studying chemistry before I was in vet school, all of a sudden it all clicked, and I go, "Wait a minute, we never talked about this."

KB: Right.

BR: And it's super important.

KB: It is.

BR: And then having also just all of the building blocks available in a form that the body understands, with the moisture content that the body understands.

KB: Right.

BR: One of the other things that's sort of an unseen thing in dry kibble is you're providing a food that actually clinically dehydrates them for awhile.

KB: Right.

BR: So, if you have an older animal or an animal with kidney disease or things like that, it's going to cause a problem down the road.

KB: It will. Long-term dehydration inevitably results in organ degeneration.

BR: Absolutely.

KB: And yet that was never discussed in vet school.

BR: No, not at all.

KB: And although they would say, you know, “Feed canned foods.” Of course, we’re supportive of that. That’s wonderful. We didn’t talk about the fact that that food is still dead and enzyme-deficient. And what role do enzymes play in systemic health and managing inflammation?

BR: And probiotics. I’ve been talking about things that are in foods that cause problems, but things that are not in there also are going to be another issue. So, so much of our GI tract is bacteria, and all kinds of different biotic enzymes are happening as the bacteria are processing things. If we denude our body of those important things, we’re going to have problems.

KB: Yeah, absolutely. How does the American Holistic Veterinary Medical Foundation further the understanding and knowledge base of our practices of integrative and holistic medicine?

BR: Basically, the idea, I think, is to get information out. One of our biggest problems, I think, is that in human medicine, it’s nice because you have a huge hospital that will fund a large study. It will be an easy thing to sort of get information out to people about different products. In veterinary medicine, we have individual little hospitals and all kinds of people working really hard to do their own thing. But there isn’t that larger infrastructure of research and a way to get the message out.

KB: Yes.

BR: So, if you have a foundation that can do that, and also that is forwarding the integrative medicine practices that we do, that’s really the idea. It’s having a structure, an infrastructure for people to go to in order to do the research and to get the information out.

KB: Our goal for this fundraiser, of course, is to be able to collect cash to be able to help students...

BR: Yes.

KB: Further their knowledge, to be able to help veterinarians get extra training that they need to be able to have continuing education available, so they would be able to acquire skills and knowledge to be able to become more knowledgeable about integrative medicine.

BR: Right. It’s education from the students on up, including even some, you know. There is even some undergrad work being done.

KB: Yeah.

BR: Then there are veterinary schools. We’re integrating programs in veterinary schools where they are actually going to be teaching integrative medicine.

KB: Wonderful.

BR: And that’s actually happening now. Part of that, we recently funded a 10,000-dollar grant to start some of these programs just to seed them and get people interested.

KB: Excellent.

BR: So, it's not just with education, though. It's also then going to be with research.

KB: With research, yeah, which is wonderful.

BR: Yeah.

KB: Well, thank you so much for joining me today.

BR: You're welcome. Thank you for having me.

KB: I appreciate you being here.

[END]