

# **Embracing Integrative Modalities to Better Help Animals**

## **A Special Interview With Dr. Christine Woodford**

**By Dr. Karen Becker**

**Dr. Karen Becker:**

Hi, I'm Dr. Karen Becker. And I'm so excited that today, Leah has nominated her veterinarian, Dr. Christine Woodford, who is joining me here today to talk more about the amazing work she's doing with a lot of different species from the motherland, my home state, Iowa. So welcome, Dr. Woodford, and congratulations on your Game Changer Award.

**Dr. Christine Woodford:**

Oh, wow. Thank you so much, Karen. I'm so honored and just inspired to be here with you today.

**Dr. Karen Becker:**

Well, thank you. And Leah had such good, kind, amazing things to say about all of the amazing modalities, innovative treatments that you offer, and we'll get into that. But right now, for our listeners, readers, viewers, will you walk us through your journey to become a veterinarian, question number one? And then question number two, clearly you have expanded your tool belt to have a bunch more tools, and there had to be a story behind how you decided to keep learning, growing and gathering more certifications to help your patients. So, let us know. Give us the backstory on your career as a vet and then an integrative vet.

**Dr. Christine Woodford:**

Yeah. Yeah. Well, many people know that they want to be a vet from the time they were in grade school. I was not one of those persons. I loved animals. I grew up on a small acreage north of Dubuque in Iowa. We had horses, we had dogs, we had cats. I loved animals. They're truly my passion. When the vet would come out to help with the horses, I was the first person there to help him out. I got excited when I saw the vet truck going up and down the road. But honestly, I didn't think I could afford vet school. I loved school. I went to college. I was very interested in the sciences. I had some scholarships to go on to grad school in research science. I liked that path because I really enjoyed teaching.

When I entered the work field, I basically was qualified to do research. And that research, it was interesting, it was medical-based. But for me, I was going into a lab eight to 10 hours a day, and it wasn't my passion. At that point, I was in my mid-20s and just thinking, "Do I really want to do this for the rest of my life?" But I always had that passion for animals, especially horses, so I'm like, "Why not?" So I applied to vet school, and I got in at Iowa State.

**Dr. Karen Becker:**

Woo-hoo.

**Dr. Christine Woodford:**

And then I was really focused that I really wanted to focus my veterinary career on horses. So, I was grateful when I graduated, I got an all-equine job in Eastern Iowa. It was a really busy practice. I gained a lot of experience. I was on call a lot, and I did a lot of emergencies. And we did a lot of lameness at that time, and I still have horses and I show horses. But really, what triggered me for more of the integrative path – we traveled to a show in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and one of the horses, when she got off the trailer, I could just tell something wasn't right. And all the tools in my toolbox, anti-inflammatories, the other things, it just wasn't getting to the heart of the problem.

Thankfully, I found somebody at the show to do some bodywork on her, and she was really out of alignment in her upper cervical, in her withers, her rib cage and her shoulder. And that made the world of difference, and then she went on to perform well at that show. And I was like, “Wow, there is something to this.” So, I first got certified in animal chiropractic, and that was an amazing course, amazing instructors, amazing students. Several of the other vets in that course were already trained in acupuncture, and I really learned how the two modalities went well together. So, then I pursued further education in veterinary acupuncture. And then at that point, it was either time to buy into the practice that I was currently working at, and that was an option, or to go out on my own.

And I really saw the need for it for animals and an opportunity to start my own practice offering the chiropractic and acupuncture [services] to animals. And then it just developed out of there. In the beginning, it was mainly horses. I did a paradigm shift. At that busy practice, when I was on call so much, I felt like I could never leave, knowing that when I started my own practice and I wrote a good business plan, that I would have to travel to areas to keep my calendar full and to treat enough animals to make the business work. Well, then I felt like I was never home. I was always traveling, working on animals, which was really enjoyable. Met lots of great people and in the beginning, lots and lots of horses and the occasional farm dog. But what's so interesting with the small animals was the incredible differences that these integrative therapies could make on their bodies. It was a couple of dachshunds. In the beginning, I did not have good luck with dachshunds, back dogs.

A horse friend of mine, her dachshund had got picked up by the neighbor's dog and [was] shook and dropped, and acutely not using its legs. She came to me, actually, at a horse show, and I was doing range of motion on her spine, did some acupuncture, and I had just invested, for the horses, into a Magna Wave machine, pulsed electromagnetic field therapy. And I thought to myself, “Hmm, let me try to stimulate the needles with this.” Because in acupuncture training, we could stimulate the needles with the electroacupuncture. I started stimulating the needles with the Magna Wave machine, and that little dog got better. And then her vet, she went back to her vet, and she was like, “Wow.” And that vet actually had another dachshund with a similar injury that she referred to me and that dachshund got better. And so, it just started to open up my world of how powerful these therapies are, and we're giving these animals a second chance on life. It's so exciting.

**Dr. Karen Becker:**

It's so exciting. And I also love that you started out very equine-focused. I don't treat anything that can't fit through the front door. And it's so cute, my equine friends will say, "You can get a horse through the front door." I just don't have any experience with large animals at all. I'm almost frightened, and they know that, so I just stick with the little guys. But I feel like the entire equine community is generally more open to bodywork, chiropractic. They're just more open-minded to physical well-being modalities that are very common in human medicine, pretty well accepted in equine medicine, and that have taken a little bit longer for dog and cat practitioners to embrace, but also pet parents of dogs and cats to embrace.

But it's happening now, and sometimes all it takes is one or two veterinarians saying, "Oh my gosh, there's someone in my town or my community doing this." And then pretty soon, within a short period of time, you will pivot from being primarily equine to primarily small animal, and I've heard this over and over. Are you still seeing some – Would you call yourself mixed animal practice now?

**Dr. Christine Woodford:**

Yes, yes, yes, yes. It's about 50/50. I'd say 50% horses, and then 50% small animals. And I guess I should lump into the horses, I have a niche with show stock also, with cattle, sheep.

**Dr. Karen Becker:**

Oh.

**Dr. Christine Woodford:**

Yeah. So, it's interesting.

**Dr. Karen Becker:**

That's super interesting. Of course, mammals are mammals, and the nervous system is the nervous system. Do they respond equally as well with your integrative modalities?

**Dr. Christine Woodford:**

Yes, yes, yes. It's very cool. Mm-hmm. It's so fun to see the improvements in movement and feeling better. And then they often go off to the show pen and they perform better.

**Dr. Karen Becker:**

That's really great. We were talking before we started this podcast, this interview, a little bit about how when I graduated from vet school, I was torn whether I should set up my integrated proactive wellness hospital [inaudible 00:08:46]. Chicago is where I ended up because it was the closest big city to where my parents lived in Cedar Falls. I think it's wonderful that you have a thriving practice in Iowa. Would you say that, across the board, you have been – when I say, I don't know, I don't want to say well-received, but have you – I felt like 30 years ago, when I would maybe mention acupuncture for a back dog, I was afraid about confusion from my clients

and also other veterinarians. So, I went to a big city. We don't have to do that now. And I'm interested in knowing what your reception has been both from your community, but also the veterinarians that are referring to you?

**Dr. Christine Woodford:**

Yeah. That's really interesting. In the very beginning when I was marketing my business, I went into a few vet clinics to drop off some business cards and some brochures, and I even offered to do a few lunch-and-learns for their staff, and I can't say that I was super well-received. However, it was really client-based driven, where clients would come to me sometimes as a last resort and my recommendation is let's try three treatments to see if we can make it better. If we can't, we know we've done all that we could. And oftentimes, they get better. They go back to their veterinarians, and they're like, "Wow, there is something to this." So now, I do get a lot of referrals from vets, and actually I work on some animals owned by veterinarians, which I think is so cool also.

**Dr. Karen Becker:**

That's so awesome. And I just love how our practice is – Veterinarians, as a community, are hopefully becoming not just more open-minded, but willing to embrace – Each of us cover a niche that resonates with our professional life, of course, but also with our personal life. And you've developed this beautiful practice that is different but offers these wildly and very beneficial modalities that other veterinarians in your community don't offer. So, there's synergism there that is really something to celebrate, but it does take – Especially if veterinarians have no background, no introduction. Certainly, we didn't learn about any of this in veterinary school. If they're a little more cautious, all it takes is one paralyzed back dog to walk back in their practice. And usually, you can build some ongoing relationships from there. I'm really glad to hear that you're well-supported in your veterinary community in Iowa. That warms my heart.

**Dr. Christine Woodford:**

Thank you. Thank you.

**Dr. Karen Becker:**

So, you'd – Yeah, go ahead.

**Dr. Christine Woodford:**

The next journey that I've been on, which again, I realized there's only so much that I can do in my office at one session. Over the last 10 years, I've really tried to educate my clients on some things that they can do at home, certain stretches that they can do for their animals, [a] good exercise program. But really, a key point, especially when it comes to small animals, is nutrition. And I try to educate them on feeding the highest-quality food that they can within their lifestyle and budget. And is it okay to share a story on how I improve the nutrition world?

**Dr. Karen Becker:**

Please. Yes. Yes. Yeah.

**Dr. Christine Woodford:**

Well, it was actually my own heart dog who's pictured right above here, Jelly. When Jelly was 10 years old, she was pounced on by a big dog, and it ruptured a disc in her back. I did decide to have the surgery done on her, and thankfully, the surgery was successful. However, it still took her six weeks of rehab to walk after the surgery. And at that time, she was a corgi, so short legs, long back, 10 years old and overweight. And I really knew in order to get her mobile again, that she needed to lose some weight. At that time, I was feeding a dry kibble diet, and it's like, "Well, we either have to burn more calories or take in less calories." So, I took that amount of kibble that I was feeding her and I cut it in half. She thought she was starving. I added some canned pumpkin and some green beans in to help fill her up.

When I took her back for her six-week checkup, she'd lost 3 pounds, which was 10% of her body weight. She was in Weight Watchers. She'd get a gold star. The surgeon was so happy, he said to continue that weight loss journey for her to regain mobility. And I continued with that small amount of food that I was feeding for a couple of months, and then we just hit a plateau. I was in a networking group with other veterinarians that did acupuncture and was introduced to an array of different foods out there. And I switched her to a dehydrated raw diet. She lost more weight, got to a leaner body condition score. But not only the weight loss, her hair coat got better, her muscle tone got better. It was almost like she was aging in reverse. And she lived another six and a half years. She lived to 16 and a half years. So, I'm just so blessed.

And then that really inspired me to go down like, "There's better nutrition out there." And so, I took a food therapy course that was taught through the acupuncture, the Chi Institute. Learned a lot more about the energetics of food. But for me, I was still missing those basic nutrition pieces. And so, this winter, I actually took my own course. It was online. It was a six-month course taught by CIVT (College of Integrative Veterinary Therapies). You were one of the guest lecturers. Thank you so much. Just learned so much about the importance of macronutrients and micronutrients, and how we can get good and complete balanced diets through whole food nutrition. And I'm just so excited to share that with my clients and other pet parents.

**Dr. Karen Becker:**

Good for you. You're a perpetual learner, like I am. We just are always learning something. And that nutrition piece is something that is really irreplaceable. Nothing we can do – we can't supplement our way out of poor nutrition. It's like exercise. There's no pill for exercise, and there's no pill that's going to make – A multivitamin is not going to make up for an ultra-processed diet. And so, when we add that piece to the protocol, that's oftentimes the pivot that's needed to prompt a healing response if you have a plateau situation. It's such an inspiring thing to watch. And even 30 years later, watching the transformations after dietary change, either I'm filled with awe or I cry tears of joy because it never fails to be so inspiring what the power of food can do. And I love it when veterinarians see that firsthand, and then like you, could just say, "Okay, I'm going to learn now what maybe I didn't learn in veterinary school." And good for you because you're just continuing to add to your practice different and really important modalities that will give you additional healing responses. It's so exciting.

So, when you wake up in the morning, what do you love most about – First of all, you work in a lot of different species. You do a lot of different things. So, I know every day is different, and that has to bring you a lot of joy, but what gets you out of bed and fired up first thing in the morning?

**Dr. Christine Woodford:**

It is just seeing the difference in the animals that I treat and also the relationships that I build with the clients. Typically, people find me for a problem. Either their dog is injured, or the geriatric dog is maybe not doing the stairs quite as well as they were, or the performance animal's just not performing like they should. So, they find me for a problem, but I really try to educate them on the wellness program. It's not a one-time fix. So again, I usually recommend three treatments. And then if we see a difference, whether we treat the animal once every one to six months, depending on the animal. And it's just so fun.

Over the years, I've developed great relationships with my clients too, learning about their life. One particular [client], she's so neat. I meet her up in the Dubuque area, I work up there once a month, and their dog came with a back issue. Well, now, Macy, the dog, is doing so much better, but I followed her through her high school and college career, now her work career, and she's getting married in a couple of months. I see her twice a year, but it's just so fun to catch up on her life.

**Dr. Karen Becker:**

Yeah. That is such a lovely piece of – The human-animal bond, us being invited into the homes and lives of our clients and being viewed as an extra rental family member in one way. It is. It brings a lot. It adds depth and breadth to being able to have longer-term relationships with our clients and oftentimes, several pets through our client's life. We're able to provide care for several different animals at different decades, and that's an honor to be able to provide that care.

**Dr. Christine Woodford:**

Absolutely.

**Dr. Karen Becker:**

I just love [that] you're doing it in Iowa.

**Dr. Christine Woodford:**

In Iowa.

**Dr. Karen Becker:**

I love that you're doing it in Iowa. I love it. This is just flipping fantastic. First of all, when you went to veterinary school, were you open-minded? I think as you were in the equine world, the thought of bodywork [is] not a big deal and chiropractic. Were you pretty open in recognizing,

“Yeah, I mean, whatever works. Above all, do no harm, but if it works, why not use it?” Or did it take you a little while to really – Were you a little skeptical of-

**Dr. Christine Woodford:**

Because we used those modalities for our horses, I was definitely open-minded to it. And even though my track in vet school was very equine-focused – There was a great neurologist at Iowa State. She did mostly small animals, but she was board-certified in acupuncture. And so, I took her [inaudible 00:19:21] for our fourth year, the neurology rotation, and I learned so much from her. I didn't know if it was a short – It was definitely in the future. I was interested in those modalities and saw the power of them. But it just took a little time to unfold my plan. It's been a journey. My career has been a journey, and it still is a journey, twists and turns.

I love the horse work. It's wonderful. It's the energy that those animals give back to you. But as I age, I have to be aware of my body. I had a torn meniscus a few years ago. I fell skiing three years ago and ruptured my ACL (anterior cruciate ligament). I can really relate to my ACL dog patients. And what was interesting [is] just how the universe works. I'm really trying to expand my nutrition services, and it was about two months ago, that morning, I had a phone call with a wonderful canine nutritionist from England, Emma Ruthford.

**Dr. Karen Becker:**

Oh, sure?

**Dr. Christine Woodford:**

Yep. And I just wanted to know how she expanded her nutrition services. And I told her, “As I age, I want to use more of my brain and less of my body.” Well, that afternoon, I had a bunch of horse calls, and lo and behold – In Iowa, in the summertime, we have flies. And I was on my bale adjusting a horse's back, and it kicked at a fly and it kicked the bale out from underneath my feet. So, the horse never made contact with me, but I made contact with the ground, and I fractured my wrist, my distal radius, two months ago, and I just thought, “Well, universe, you're telling me something.” It's time to expand my nutrition services because my hand was in a brace for six weeks. So thankfully, it healed, and I'm back to working on large animals again. When certain things happen in my world, it just has me do maybe a little twist or jiggy jog, and it opens up lots more opportunities.

**Dr. Karen Becker:**

It's a really beautiful way to view life rather than, “How could this have happened? This is horrible timing.” We can either be frustrated with what life deals at us, throws at us, wings at us, or recognize, “Okay, this is an opportunity for me to pivot and do other things.” And it's wonderful that you are able to pivot. And it's wonderful that you have so many different species, that you have enough smaller animals to where you're going to be able to preserve the integrity of your body as you continue to go through your career, because you've got this diversified spectrum of all mammals, which is wonderful. So, how many years have you been a veterinarian?

**Dr. Christine Woodford:**

21 years.

**Dr. Karen Becker:**

Okay. That's so awesome. So awesome. That's long enough for you to have many evolutions and lots of eye-opening experiences and lots of pivots in your heart and mind and soul that has made you the doctor that you are. I'm going to say you're probably halfway done like me. Thus far in your career, if you could share one thing with the world, or if you would want the world to know one thing that you've learned or that you'd want to pass along, what would it be?

**Dr. Christine Woodford:**

To follow your heart and follow your passion, and that's what I did. In the beginning, my college career took me to the sciences. Even though vet research is definitely necessary, I wasn't passionate about it. So, I went back to college. Some people ask me, "How many years have you had in college?" More than most, but it was so worth it, the journey that I took, because now I'm so passionate about what I do. And even though it is work, it doesn't feel like work to me. It's just so many great experiences. I get to meet great people with great animals, great pets. And I feel like with what I'm doing and what I'm teaching the pet parents and the animal owners, that we're making a huge difference in the animal's life. So just follow your passion, and then it will never feel like work. And also, continue to be a lifelong learner. It's not like we just learned something here and then we're done. Just continue to learn along the way and enjoy the journey.

**Dr. Karen Becker:**

Really wise words, beautiful words. And I'm so thankful that you recognize that your career in research is a great gift and you have that knowledge, but it wasn't filling your soul. Good for you. It's a hard choice to make professional changes in life, and going back to medical school for four years is a tough call. Good for you for just doing it. Because out of your fulfillment in what you're doing, you're helping so many around you and also bringing hope and light and a bunch of new modalities to people that otherwise wouldn't have access to those beautiful tools in your area. So, I am so thankful that Leah nominated you for a Game Changer Award, and I wanted to say thank you again for taking time to talk with me. Tell me more about the awesome work that you're doing and the animals that you're helping in Iowa. I'm so thankful that Leah nominated you, and congratulations again on your award.

**Dr. Christine Woodford:**

Oh, thank you so much. Yes, yes. It's an honor to be here with you, Dr. Karen Becker. I've listened to several of your podcasts, I've read your book, and I recommend all of those tools to my clients also. And so, when I got the email that you wanted to interview me, I was just like, ah, jumping for joy inside.

**Dr. Karen Becker:**



Well, thank you so much. I love camaraderie with my beautiful integrative veterinarians around the world. And I also love that we're building a kind, collective, supportive community to offer integrative modalities to people that otherwise may not have it. I am very thankful that we're growing this awesome community of integrative vets, and I appreciate so thankfully that you are a part of it.

**Dr. Christine Woodford:**

Oh, thank you so much.