

Bringing the Gift of Integrative Care Into the Home

What's even better than a local veterinary clinic that provides alternative modalities such as acupuncture, Chinese medicine and laser therapy? House calls! That's what our newest Game Changer, Dr. Peggy LaCombe, is doing - giving her patients the gift of in-home integrative care.

Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker

[Download Interview Transcript](#) | [Download my FREE Podcast](#)

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Dr. Peggy LaCombe of At Your Bark & Call Veterinary House Calls, a mobile veterinary practice based in Phoenix, Arizona
- She was nominated for a Healthy Pets Game Changer Award by Fern M.
- In addition to being a certified acupuncturist, Dr. LaCombe also practices Chinese medicine, laser therapy and other alternative modalities
- By coming into her clients' homes, she's able to view the animal's environment to get a clearer picture of their overall health than would be possible in a clinic setting
- Doing house calls and offering holistic modalities allow her to make a difference in the animal's quality of life; it's what she loves most about the work she's doing

Dr. Peggy LaCombe of At Your Bark & Call Veterinary House Calls always knew she wanted to be a veterinarian. After graduating from Colorado State University with her veterinary degree in 1993, she worked as a conventional veterinarian for years until finding her true calling — providing holistic care to her animal patients right in their own homes.

"I always had an affinity for animals and probably more so than people. It was easier for me to communicate with animals, and we always had pets growing up, and I just love animals. And always that's what I wanted to do, is be a vet," she said.

Nominated for a Healthy Pets Game Changer Award by Fern M., Dr. LaCombe had long considered giving alternative medicine a try.

"My mom had migraines really bad when I was a kid," she said, "and she had acupuncture from an anesthesiologist and it cured her migraines. And so I always had that in the back of my mind, 'that's really interesting.' And then, finally, I just took the plunge and learned how to do acupuncture. And from there, it's just blown my mind."

In addition to being a certified acupuncturist, Dr. LaCombe also practices Chinese medicine, laser therapy and other alternative modalities. In 2012, she became the owner of At Your Bark and Call Veterinary House Calls, a mobile veterinary practice based in Phoenix, Arizona.

"Just this past year," Dr. LaCombe said, "I finally transitioned to just being holistic and a more referral-based practice. I still do integrative for my long-term clients," but in most cases "they have a regular vet and I just do the additional stuff to try to help them have a better quality of life."

Giving the Gift of In-Home Veterinary Care

As a veterinarian who only does house calls, Dr. LaCombe spends a good part of her day driving to see individual patients. While she must limit the number of animals in her care, those that she does see get her sole focus and undivided attention. In an average day, Dr. LaCombe sees three to seven patients, offering mostly acupuncture, laser and manual therapies.

"Those appointments usually last a good hour by the time we're talking about what's happening with the pet and maybe the owner," she said. "But I find that most animals are more calm. They're more receptive to therapy being at home, and it's just more relaxing, I think, for all of us ... I really love it. I can't imagine going back to a regular practice."

Dr. LaCombe has regular patients that she sees on a weekly or biweekly basis, traveling up to a 35-minute drive to see them. By coming into their homes, she's able to view the animal's environment to get a clearer picture of their overall health than would be possible in a clinic setting. This, in turn, allows her to make a difference in the animal's quality of life. It's what she loves most about the work she's doing. Dr. LaCombe said:

"If they're really struggling, if they're really painful, you can help relieve that without them having a lot of bad side effects from it. And you can work in conjunction with Western meds, but still you can really decrease the dependence on that ... so they actually feel like they want to get up and move and go for a walk and eat well and all that ..."

Also helping the owners realize that they're doing — for the older patients that don't have a lot of time left — what they can and in a humane, compassionate way. They just feel like they're doing everything they can for their pet and in a quality way."

Always Keep Looking for the Best Options for Your Pet

Dr. LaCombe's journey to this fulfilling point in her career started off rocky. "I was told several times along the way that there's no way I could be a vet, that I didn't have the qualifications, I didn't have the right temperament ... I had some professors in undergrad [who said] there's no way. My advisor even told me, 'You're not going to get into vet school.'"

But Dr. LaCombe didn't let that stop her, and thank goodness for that. It's a lesson in perseverance and drive to keep your dreams alive no matter what. By achieving her goal to be a veterinarian, and now a holistic mobile vet, countless animals' lives will be better off.

"And I didn't even get a degree," Dr. LaCombe said, as she got into veterinary school before she even graduated. "I went to Colorado State. I applied when I was a junior at NAU [Northern Arizona University] — and just for practice because I wanted to know what it was like to apply for the following year — and I actually got admitted that year."

She wants people to keep learning, as she has, and not settle for treatment that might not be giving your pet the best outcomes possible. "Be kind, be understanding and be curious,"

Dr. LaCombe said. "If you don't like what's happening with your pet's care or you feel like you're not getting the information you need, reach out, look elsewhere, because there's a lot of us out there that do different things that may be helpful for your pet. If you're running into a roadblock, there may be something else out there that can help."

If you'd like to learn more about Dr. LaCombe, you can find her at her website, atyourbarkandcall.net.¹

Sources and References

¹ [At Your Bark & Call Veterinary House Calls](#)
