

Healing the Whole Pet With Natural and Alternative Therapies

For many years, Dr. Andrea Carlson worked under a mentor who insisted that natural medicine wasn't real. Once she realized she was treating the same things over and over again, she set out to prove 'hopeless' cases aren't always hopeless when you're willing to take a more holistic approach.

Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Today's Pet Game Changer is Dr. Andrea Carlson, owner of Southlake Animal Hospital in Merrillville, IN, which offers integrative veterinary medicine with a focus on healing the whole pet through good nutrition, a great immune system, and a combination of traditional and holistic therapies
- Dr. Andrea, like so many holistically oriented practitioners, has a love of learning, and her thirst for knowledge has allowed her to add many natural and alternative therapies to her veterinary toolbox to better serve her patients and clients
- One thing Dr. Andrea loves about her work is her ability to offer hope to pets sent to her as "hopeless" cases; she also loves getting referrals of clients interested in a more holistic approach to their pet's care

Today my guest is veterinarian Dr. Andrea Carlson, who was nominated for a Game Changer award by Juanita P, Debra B, and Karen W. Dr. Andrea is the owner of Southlake Animal Hospital in Merrillville, IN, which offers a truly integrative approach (both conventional and holistic) to pet care, including ultraviolet ozone therapy, laser therapy, nutrition and species appropriate diets, and chiropractic.

A Lifetime of Learning Helps Us Be the Best We Can Be

I'm always fascinated by the forces that compel my fellow veterinarians to go beyond the standard vet school training to gain knowledge and skills in alternative healing methods. I asked Dr. Andrea what motivated her to expand her practice to embrace a truly integrative approach to veterinary medicine.

"Well, I always wanted to be a veterinarian," she replies. "Actually, I wanted to be a teacher for a long time, and then discovered I had a passion for animals. My dad always rescued animals and instilled a love of animals in me.

So, I knew I wanted to be a vet a long time ago. I was always interested in natural medicine, but truth be told, my mentor discouraged me from pursuing natural medicine and told me it wasn't real, and it wouldn't help me, and I wouldn't be successful at it. So, I let it go all through vet school, and then graduated and worked for the same man [the mentor] for a long time.

When the opportunity arose to buy the practice and make it my own, I knew I wanted to change direction. I wanted to be able to offer my patients more. I was tired of treating the same things over and over again, and I knew there had to be a better way.

And so, I started my journey into holistic medicine about 12 years ago. I got extra certifications. I'm a traditional Chinese veterinary medicine practitioner certified in acupuncture, Chinese herbs, Chinese massage, and Chinese food therapy.

I just kept going from there. Every time I learn something, I find out that there's more to learn. I'm also certified in animal chiropractic and end-of-life care, and I'm starting rehab certification. I just attended a weekend course in applied kinesiology. Fifteen or 20 years ago, I didn't know a thing about energy medicine or all the other therapies out there. I feel that lifetime learning is the best way to be the best I can be."

Offering Hope When There Is None

What Dr. Andrea loves most about her work is her ability to offer hope to her patients and clients.

"It's giving hope when there is none," she explains. "It's offering hope to patients who've been given two weeks to live, that I can help them live months longer and with a good quality of life. It's giving hope to clients who love their pets. They've been told 'There's nothing more we can do,' but they come to me and I'm able to say, 'There's always something we can do.'

They break down in tears because no one has given them hope. So, that's my goal is to give them hope, and give their pet the best possible life for the longest possible time. I also love working with my staff. I couldn't do what I do without them, and I try to take good care of them.

I think I'm even giving hope to conventional vets in the area. They're starting to send me their patients. They're like, 'I don't know what she does. It's kind of crazy, but whatever she does, it works, and I don't know what else to do for your pet.' So those people are starting to trust me too. And that really makes me feel good."

Dr. Andrea explains that much of the growth of her practice is client-driven, because pet owners are now asking for nutritional advice and holistic alternatives to traditional treatments.

"There are several vets in the area that now tell these clients, 'You know what? We don't do that. We're happy to be your conventional vet, but we know this place in Merrillville that will do what you're asking.' That's been the biggest reward for me — getting referrals not just for end-of-life patients, but younger patients that I can begin working with who have many years left to be healthy and happy."

Just Be Kind

I asked Dr. Andrea what one thing she'd like to tell the world, given the chance.

"Be kind," she replies. "Be kind to your veterinarian, be kind to the staff, but just be kind in general. The world is a crazy place right now, and we need to be nice to each other. So many people are struggling with things we know nothing about, and it only takes a moment to be kind instead of derogatory or mean.

Also, people need to be their pet's advocate. Keep learning, keep being your pet's advocate so that you and your pet can continue having a lifelong, beautiful relationship."

You can find out more about Dr. Andrea and her wonderful integrative practice at the **Southlake Animal Hospital** website or their **Facebook** or **Instagram** pages.

"Before we end, I want to thank you," says Dr. Andrea. "Someone recently said that you and a couple of others out there are the godmothers of holistic medicine. That really stuck with me, because it was people like you that encouraged me, whether you knew it or not, to continue this journey. And without people like you, I think we wouldn't be where we are. So, thank you very much for all that you've done."

I'm honored to work alongside game changers like Dr. Andrea as we build health in our patients, as well as a community of loving, kind, supportive pet owners who are empowered to provide the very best options for their animals. Together, we're much more powerful, stronger, and more knowledgeable than we are standing alone.
