



## Preface

# Integrative Medicine: What Is it Good for?



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*Editor*

It is an honor to be invited to be the guest editor for this issue of *Veterinary Clinics of North America: Equine Practice* that explores some of the modalities that are routinely used within integrative medicine practices. I am acutely aware that after decades of clinical use and continued scientific explorations, the topic of integrative medicine may remain controversial to a certain proportion of equine practitioners. However, a large majority of veterinarians, veterinary students, and horse owners have used many of these techniques to diagnose and manage select musculoskeletal or neurologic disorders in themselves and their equine patients. Personally, I would not be able complete a basic musculoskeletal evaluation without using specific observational skills to assess subtle behavioral changes or proprioceptive deficits or incorporate the requisite soft tissue palpation and joint mobilization techniques without advanced training in manual therapy, acupuncture, and physical rehabilitation. As has been said, “Your treatment is only as good as your diagnosis.” The field of integrative medicine has greatly expanded and has become a mainstay within most sports medicine practices, as many horse owners are demanding a more sophisticated approach to the diagnosis and management of subtle performance-limiting issues, and many equine practitioners are frustrated with the limitations of routine diagnostic or treatment options for addressing some of these challenging cases. The sole reliance on pharmaceuticals or surgical approaches can only provide a certain level of care, especially for chronic disease processes, vague lameness, or poorly defined performance issues. There are very few horses that can be managed solely on nonsteroidal antiinflammatories (NSAIDs) drugs or corticosteroids for musculoskeletal injuries or sustain prolonged athletic careers without incorporating basic stretching exercises, myofascial work, or physical rehabilitation. Options for providing preventative care or the management of retired or geriatric horses to optimize well-being and quality of life have also been largely supported by incorporating integrative medicine approaches.

In this issue, readers will learn how to approach clinical cases from a whole-horse perspective and to apply a wide range of appropriate therapies in a staged manner. It is not the intent to review the basic application or mechanisms of action for each individual therapy, which has been reported in many prior publications and can be referenced elsewhere. Our goal is to provide an educated glimpse into the integrative medicine toolbox and to select whatever therapies are available to us that have been shown to be safe and have some level of clinical or scientific evidence of effectiveness for specific disease conditions. General clinical disorders will be approached in a staged or tiered diagnostic or therapeutic approach whereby readily available treatments will be prescribed first and more advanced procedures or treatments with higher costs or risk:benefit ratios will be recommended at later stages of disease development. It is hoped that most clinicians presented with a horse with back pain do not opt for interspinous ligament desmotomy as an initial treatment option, but instead provide a carefully guided progression through several stages of treatment prior to making the final decision to elect for a prescribed surgical procedure. And once surgery has been performed, then the patient is not put immediately back into ridden exercise but is provided an individually tailored rehabilitation program that incorporates a wide range of therapeutic options to restore function, maximize athletic performance, and limit recurrence or comorbidities. The role of proper tack fit and use and an introduction to select rider asymmetries and impairments is also discussed, as these topics are critical for managing the ridden horse but are unfortunately frequently relegated to paraprofessionals, as the human rider is not considered to be within the scope of veterinary medicine. The intent of this issue is to provide an objective foundation on which to base claims of effectiveness and to direct clinical practice efforts.

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