Reiki in Veterinary Medicine: Benefits and Challenges

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IN HOLISTIC CARE, Reiki stands out as a gentle and effective practice that promotes relaxation and reduces stress, restoring balance and promoting well-being. Although often associated with holistic human care, Reiki is also beginning to attract interest in veterinary medicine, providing a complementary approach to conventional treatments for our animal companions.

Mikao Usui from Kyoto, Japan, founded Reiki in 1922 as a system of harmonization and energy rebalancing. He chose the name Reiki, which is a Japanese word usually translated as "spiritually guided life energy." He called his system of healing *Shin-Shin Kai-Zen Usui Reiki Ryo-Ho*, The Usui Reiki Treatment Method for Improvement of Body and Mind, or in its simplified form *Usui Reiki Ryoho*, Usui Reiki Healing Method.[1]

A Reiki practitioner channels Reiki energy to the human or animal client. The channeling of this energy, done through gentle or no touch, generates a feeling of relaxation, stress reduction, and general well-being, contributing to the rebalancing of vital energy. Today, we know that an imbalance of vital energy can lead to the physical body becoming weak and even ill, so transferring Reiki energy by a Reiki practitioner to a living being activates its ability to restore and improve its health.

Photo Courtesy of My Little Pet Day Care

An animal receiving Reiki at a veterinary facility.

Integrating Reiki into conventional medicine is widely recognized, showing a shift towards a holistic approach to health. In her book, *Reiki in Clinical Practice: A Science-Based Guide*, Ann Baldwin mentions a survey conducted in 2007 which showed that nearly 15 percent, or over 800 hospitals in the United States, were offering Reiki therapy as a regular part of their patient services.[2] Currently, according to the Institute for Integrative Healthcare website, there are over 1,000 Reiki programs in U.S. hospitals.[3]

Given this topic's growing importance, the Center for Reiki Research (CRR) recently created a workshop on in-

troducing, running, and maintaining a Reiki program in medical environments.[4] Indeed, while conventional medicine focuses primarily on treating physical symptoms and ailments, Reiki offers a complementary perspective, addressing the underlying energetic imbalances that can allow the development of diseases. This approach contributes to patient care that is genuinely priceless, regardless of whether the patient is human or animal.

Just as in human medicine, Reiki offers a noninvasive and holistic approach to treating various physical, emotional, and behavioral problems in animals. It includes pain and chronic illness, anxiety disorders, and trauma. Reiki can be an adjunct to veterinary treatments, promoting relaxation, relieving pain, and supporting the body's natural healing processes.

Because of its noninvasive nature and its potential to stimulate the body's innate healing mechanisms, I believe Reiki is particularly valuable in supporting veterinary patients, especially those suffering from chronic pain, cancer, and other complex health conditions. Several scientific studies show that besides improving pain and reducing anxiety, Reiki supports veterinary care, as it accelerates recovery from injuries and surgeries, reduces inflammation, improves symptoms and side effects of cancer, helps with skin problems and fractures, and provides physical comfort to elderly, sick, or injured animals. It is also recommended for animals in palliative care and as end-of-life support.[5]

We can also use Reiki to treat emotional disorders in animals, and it is beneficial for behavioral problems such as aggression and separation anxiety, as well as supporting the recovery of traumatized animals because of abuse and cruelty. It is also instrumental in managing and reducing stress in captive wild animals and in situations where restraint is necessary. In addition, in the human-animal relationship, Reiki helps to reduce compassion fatigue for those treating animals, both with sick animal guardians and veterinary staff, who work constantly under stress and in exhausting situations that can produce emotional exhaustion.[6]

However, in my personal experience, we still need to more fully integrate Reiki into the daily veterinary practice. Although Reiki does not replace conventional veterinary treatments, we can fully integrate it into a holistic veterinary therapeutic approach.

Photo Courtesy of Cristiano Carvalho

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Top photo: Gassho Meditation before starting an Animal Reiki session.
Bottom photo: Animal Reiki session in the countryside.

A short-term solution to this situation is for veterinarians and Reiki practitioners to work together to customize treatment strategies for each patient's specific needs. There is a section in Kathleen Prasad's book *Vets on Animal Reiki: The Power of Animal Reiki Healing in Veterinary Practice*, in which one interviewed veterinarian, Dr. Patricia Jordan, states: "A medical degree does not make you a healer…Most healers I know do not wear white coats. Having a good heart is a necessary start and is the best practice…I think Reiki is the right place where they can expand their heart's desire to do the right thing and make it work, not only for themselves but also for their patients, which is why we are here."[7]

We widely acknowledge that being a good doctor or veterinarian requires more than just technical and scientific knowledge. By merging the advantages of modern medicine with Reiki's holistic principles, veterinarians can provide more extensive and individualized care to animals. It is worth noting that today, albeit timidly, there is a growing number of veterinarians who, recognizing the impact of energetic and emotional aspects on the health of their patients, and are seeking training as Reiki practitioners or Reiki Masters to incorporate this technique into their own lives and the care of their patients.

Many case studies and testimonies demonstrate the positive impact of Reiki on animal health and well-being. A situation in which Reiki is beneficial is in the management of epilepsy in animals. In this specific case, besides my patients, I have the experience of treating my 13-year-old dog, who has had epilepsy since she was four years old. Her treatment has always been holistic, with homeopathy and nutraceuticals. After starting daily Reiki sessions, her seizures, which used to occur every six months, stopped entirely, and she has now gone almost two whole years without a single seizure.

Another practical example is end-of-life support. A few years ago, I had a feline patient who I was treating for Feline Leukemia, one of the most common infectious diseases in cats. In its progressive form, it significantly impairs the functioning of the animal's immune system, interfering with the ability to fight infections and predisposing the organism to various recurrent or persistent secondary diseases. With this kitten, I included distance Reiki in his treatment, and on a particular day, without having scheduled a session, when I started my daily practice, I felt guided to send him Reiki. At the end of the session, I contacted the guardian, and she informed me he had just passed away smoothly and painlessly, which was a comfort to the guardian.

However, despite the growing interest in Reiki for animals, scientific research on its efficacy and mechanism of action in veterinary medicine is still scarce. Even though I understand the challenges in studying energy-based therapies, such as the subjective nature of outcomes and the difficulty of controlling variables, I emphasize the importance of further research on this topic.

I firmly believe that as research in this field expands, scientifically showing the benefits of energy healing modalities such as Reiki, veterinarians will increasingly recognize its potential to promote better treatment outcomes and a more compassionate and patient-centered approach. We strive to improve animal health and quality of life by developing and promoting Reiki as an effective and sustainable form of veterinary medicine. ■

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Endnotes

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