



Position Statement on Animal Massage- Adopted 11/16/2020

The Alaska Board of Veterinary Examiners recognizes that massage can be helpful for animals, especially for animal athletes. Although animal massage has been understudied, there are well-documented benefits¹. That said, in Alaska the practice of animal massage is unregulated and there are no requirements for certification, licensure, or education for an individual offering animal massage. In other words, the burden for evaluating the competence and effectiveness of an individual masseuse is entirely upon the client.

The Alaska Board of Veterinary Examiners is concerned that that advice from a poorly trained or unaware animal masseuse can cross over into the illegal practice of veterinary medicine. Alaska Statute 08.98.120 makes it illegal in Alaska to “practice veterinary medicine, surgery, or dentistry unless the person is licensed as a veterinarian...” The Alaska Legislature has defined the practice of veterinary medicine as attempting to “diagnose, treat, correct, change, relieve, or prevent animal disease, deformity, defect, injury, or other physical or mental condition,” and it goes on to include “render advice or recommendation with regard to any [specific disease or condition].” There is a clear distinction between what is appropriate for a masseuse to point out and discuss with a client and advice or diagnosis about a specific disease or orthopedic condition in a specific animal, which, by law, can only be given by a veterinarian. It is fully appropriate for a masseuse to point out an area of the animal’s body that is sore or painful. It is also fully appropriate to point out the signs that something is wrong and to recommend that the animal be evaluated by a veterinarian. It may be appropriate to offer broad advice about such subjects as training and conditioning of an animal athlete, or to talk generally about anatomical structures and how those structures work together in walking, running, and so on. However, when a masseuse tells a client that an animal has, or even likely has, a specific condition, and that some massage therapy is indicated for that condition, then the masseuse has crossed the line and ventured into the illegal practice of veterinary medicine in Alaska.

The Alaska Board of Veterinary Examiners would like to see veterinarians and animal masseuses as respectful partners in ensuring the welfare of companion animals and animal athletes. The veterinary profession should recognize a legitimate role for animal massage. Professional and competent masseuses must understand that it is the role of the veterinarian to diagnose orthopedic defects or other disease conditions, and to recommend specific treatments for these conditions. Again, animal massage is unregulated in Alaska. A competent animal masseuse will know his or her limits, and aim to excel within the field of massage—without attempting to diagnose or recommend treatments for specific disease conditions. For the obvious reason, an animal masseuse that does not understand his or her limits is one that you don’t really want working on your animal.

¹ Maira Rezende Formenton, Marco Aurélio Amador Pereira, Denise Tabacchi Fantoni. 2017. Small Animal Massage Therapy: A Brief Review and Relevant Observations. *Topics in Companion Animal Medicine*, Volume 32, Issue 4(139-145).

Mike Scott, Lee Ann Swenson. 2009. Evaluating the Benefits of Equine Massage Therapy: A Review of the Evidence and Current Practices. *Journal of Equine Veterinary Science*. Volume 29, Issue 9, (687-697).

Michael A. Birt, Kimberly Guay, Kibby Treiber, Hugo Ramirez Ramirez, David Snyder. 2015. The Influence of a Soft Touch Therapy Flowtrition on Heart Rate, Surface Temperature, and Behavior in Horses. *Journal of Equine Veterinary Science*. Volume 35, Issue 8(636-644).