Equine patients receiving chiropractic may have serious injuries that could go undetected, leaving the rider and the animal at risk for further injury. In addition, when horses are covered with an insurance policy against loss of use or mortality, the policy may become invalidated if the animal receives treatment by a non-veterinarian.

When animals receive treatment by human chiropractors under veterinary supervision, the veterinarian’s liability insurance provides protection. This is not true when the chiropractor provides independent care.

**Does my animal need to see a veterinarian before seeing a chiropractor?**

Yes, in order to make sure that there are no underlying conditions that would cause an animal to be harmed by manual therapy or chiropractic. As mentioned above, manual therapy, including chiropractic manipulation, is not without risk.

**Does a veterinarian need to be in attendance during an animal chiropractic session?**

Yes, according to the Colorado Veterinary Practice Act. The practice of these techniques falls under the scope of veterinary practice.

**Are the techniques forceful?**

Some techniques involve quick thrusts designed to “free up” a joint, but the animals should not suffer pain or be held under forceful, prolonged restraint.

**Does my veterinarian or chiropractor need to be “certified?”**

The State of Colorado does not formally recognize any certification program in veterinary manual therapy or animal chiropractic, but whether a DVM or DC provides this service, she or he must be fully licensed by their state regulatory authority. The Colorado Veterinary Practice Act allows veterinarians to perform manual therapy as part of the comprehensive scope of practice of veterinary medicine. Increasing numbers of veterinarians are learning veterinary manual therapy in scientifically rigorous programs.

**Whom do I call if I have questions?**

Call the Colorado Veterinary Medical Association if you have further questions about veterinary manual therapy and animal chiropractic.

CVMA  
789 Sherman Street, Suite 550  
Denver, CO 80230  
303.318.0447  
Fax 303.318.0450  
info@colovma.com  
www.colovma.com
What is “veterinary manual therapy?” What is “animal chiropractic?”
Specially trained doctors of veterinary medicine (DVM or VMD) provide veterinary manual therapy (VMT) as part of their comprehensive animal treatment program. Animal chiropractic, on the other hand, is the practice of exclusively chiropractic procedures on animals, performed by licensed human chiropractors (DC’s). Both techniques usually involve using the hands to provide healing treatment to the body structure, in order to improve function.

What are the benefits?
VMT and animal chiropractic may help a variety musculoskeletal problems, pain and performance problems. As conservative treatments options, they may in some cases reduce the need for drugs or surgery. However, there is no research on the effectiveness of VMT and animal chiropractic, veterinarians must use their best educated guess to determine when and why to refer for treatment.

What happens during a treatment?
This depends on the animal’s problem, the practitioner’s training, and their personal preference. Techniques range from quick motions that move a joint just a small amount, to slower techniques that may involve massaging the muscles and taking joints through a passive range of motion. If a practitioner does anything to your animal that looks dangerous or hurts your animal, insist that the treatment stop and consult your regular veterinarian.

Will my animal need to be sedated?
No. In fact, the techniques can be more dangerous if the animal is not awake, as the joints will be more susceptible to injury, especially with extreme or vigorous maneuvers.

Are the techniques safe?
There is no research on the safety of these approaches for animals. When properly performed and done when indicated, these techniques are relatively safe. However, animals whose structures are weakened (from cancer, spinal instability, disc or bone disease, advanced age, etc.) may suffer severe injury in some cases. Improperly done chiropractic can do much more harm than good. This underscores the need for a complete workup by a veterinarian, including direct, on-site supervision by a veterinarian, before and during a treatment.

There is evidence for harm from chiropractic in humans. For example, neck manipulation can cause stroke, paralysis, vertebral fracture, tracheal rupture, diaphragm paralysis, carotid and vertebral artery damage, and more. Though rare (estimates range between 1 in 400,000 and 3-6 per 10 million neck manipulations), the potential for injury following chiropractic manipulation is real. Requiring that an animal receive a veterinary examination, diagnosis, and referral before chiropractic manipulation can be performed helps to ensure that animals will not receive manipulation when clear contraindications exist, such as spinal instability, infection, or cancer.

Several additional concerns further emphasize the need to have your veterinarian directly involved with your animal’s care if you decide to seek a human chiropractor’s help in treating your animal:
• Chiropractors lack education and training in zoonotic disease (infections that can spread to humans), and in their prompt recognition and treatment. This can put you, your family, and public health in general at risk.
• Most chiropractors learn only about human chiropractic diagnosis and treatment. Your animal is susceptible to a wide variety of conditions that humans rarely experience. Your veterinarian is the only trained professional who has sufficient training to determine whether your animal’s back pain may be due to a muscle strain, a disc problem, cancer, or infection.
• Some people may be tempted to try chiropractic first, and then visit their regular veterinarian if the chiropractic doesn’t help. However, some conditions such as cancer and infectious disease require prompt intervention. Delaying conventional veterinary care may make the situation much worse in these instances. Sometimes the window of opportunity for successful treatment closes if you wait too long to initiate care.
• Chiropractors are not required by law to keep a medical record for your animal. Thus, the course and nature of treatment will go unrecorded, if something should happen to your animal.
• Chiropractors are not typically educated in animal handling and restraint. Insufficient awareness of these important aspects of animal care can lead to injuries of the patient and bystanders. (continued)