



Animal Massage Q&A

Is it okay to have a licensed massage therapist (or physical therapist, acupuncturist, chiropractor, etc.) treat a dog if I personally request the treatment and supervise it?

No! In New York, individuals licensed in the health professions -- from medicine and nursing through massage therapy, physical therapy, acupuncture and chiropractic -- are restricted to practicing those health professions on humans.

Only a licensed veterinarian or a licensed veterinary technician working under the supervision of a veterinarian may treat animals.

There is sometimes confusion about which professionals can practice professions such as massage therapy, physical therapy, acupuncture and chiropractic on animals because not all states have the licensure restrictions that New York does.

Veterinarians and LVTs who wish to use those techniques in their practice should be aware that the New York State Board for Veterinary Medicine has stated that veterinarians and veterinary technicians must have training in complementary and alternative medical techniques before it is acceptable for them to use those techniques as part of their practice. Guideline 4.1.B from the Veterinary Medicine / Veterinary Technology Practice Guidelines, which states "The veterinarian and veterinary technician should ... complete appropriate professional training before performing any procedure or therapy" is intended to mean that the veterinarian and veterinary technician who wish to use any of these special therapies on their animal patients must have some training in their use. The training requirement doesn't mean that they must be licensed as a human health practitioner in that field, but merely that they have received sufficient training to practice those modalities safely and appropriately on their animal patients. If they have not received any training in these techniques but wish their patients to receive this treatment, they should refer the animal patient to a veterinarian who specializes in this treatment.

If a veterinarian permits a licensed massage therapist or another licensed human health professional to treat animals under his/her supervision, the veterinarian is in violation of the Regents Rule that prohibits "delegating professional responsibilities to a person when the licensee delegating such responsibilities knows ... that such person is not qualified by ... licensure, to perform them." (There are exceptions only for dentistry and for the treatment of the great apes by human medical specialists when a veterinary specialist is not available.)