

Helping Horses Heal Through Integrative Techniques

A Special Interview With Dr. Lillian Bonner

By Dr. Karen Shaw Becker

Dr. Karen Becker:

Hi, I'm Dr. Karen Becker, and today Karen has nominated Dr. Lillian Bonner for a Game Changer Award. And I have Dr. Lillian with me now to talk more about the amazing work that she's doing as a veterinarian. And I am so thankful to be able to have this opportunity. Dr. Lillian, congratulations on your Game Changer Award, and thank you for taking a few minutes out of your very busy schedule to talk.

Dr. Lillian Bonner:

Oh, thank you. And thanks for sharing all your intentions behind the Game Changer program. So, I'm an integrative veterinarian with mainly a background in equine medicine. And I've been practicing integrative medicine probably for about, actually probably for about 16 years now. I originally studied to become a veterinarian in the United States after managing a horse farm and training horses. I was rehabbing a lot of horses at that point and then decided to carry on and become a veterinarian. So, I studied and I completed an internship. And after my internship, I accepted a job in New Zealand. I had been working in referral centers up until that point, and really intensive cases, medicine and surgery. And then when I moved to New Zealand, I was working mainly with racehorses and healthy animals in the field for the first time. And I had a background with racehorses before but, I don't know, within a first couple of months I started realizing I needed to learn other techniques to address healthy animals that needed to perform at a high level.

So, I started searching and I actually met someone who practiced Reiki at that point, who had been a veterinarian, and I went and had a Reiki session with her. And then it was really powerful for me personally, so I decided to learn it for myself. And then I started to incorporate it into my own practice, and I just started seeing amazing results. I was incorporating it with conventional medicine at that point, and then it just continued to grow. And I did take some time off from practice. I did government medicine at that point. I was looking at export horses. And I decided I wanted to return to practice after a couple of years. So, at that point, I really committed to doing just integrative therapy, and I went to the Chi University and studied acupuncture, and I came back to New Zealand and practiced acupuncture for a few years, and then decided to incorporate more manual therapy into my practice.

So, I studied in Australia for a couple of years and learned animal biomechanical medicine and learned some osteopathy and chiropractic and rehabilitation techniques, and it just all fit really well. So, I've been doing that full-time, my practice probably for the last 11 years. And there's a lot of practitioners now around doing that, that are incorporating it. So, it's good to see it grow. And that's kind of my story.

Dr. Karen Becker:

It sounds to me like you are a practitioner that – when we graduate from med school, we don't have nearly the tools that we think – I think, at least for me, I thought I would be somewhat well-equipped and it can pull you over with how ill-equipped, at least from my perspective, how unequipped I was to deal with the cases I was seeing. And so, my goal was just to be able to have enough resources to help my patients and I felt like I didn't, hence me just taking class course after course after course to try and help better than I knew I was incompetent in helping, and I just wanted to become competent.

I have a feeling that you are very similar in that you are seeing this massive need. I have never worked on horses, and I certainly have never worked on this caliber of resources or super elite athletes. That literally is kind of a specialty in and of itself that would require, I think, all sorts of additional tools. So probably, you just have continued to gain all the tools you need by, I don't want to say by default, but out of necessity because your patients demand that level of incredible integration. I'm assuming, I don't work on any horses, but I can't imagine. I can't imagine. You're basically working on super elite athletes.

Dr. Lillian Bonner:

Yeah, I mean it came from them, to be quite honest. I was injecting joints and doing really high-level sports medicine, but it just wasn't – I guess I'm a perfectionist and I could see that it wasn't actually addressing everything, and they're just looking at me. Because I'd worked with horses for such a long time as a rider and a trainer in that capacity, I was just like, I just need to help them. It's just not enough. There needs to be more. So, I just followed that thread basically. Just kind of started.

Dr. Karen Becker:

That's just wonderful. And so, do you do telemedicine or – there are people that are going to read this interview or see this interview and think, “Oh my gosh, I need her. I need her.” Is there – do you work with people via Zoom or telemedicine? Or are you overwhelmingly busy with your current clientele and that's that?

Dr. Lillian Bonner:

At the moment, I don't really. I'm pretty busy with just my local client. I'm open to trying to point people in the right direction. But yeah, I'm still very, very hands-on. I'll have people contact me and often I can get a feeling from the history, but I always feel like I need to get my hands on because I'm a very hands-on person and almost – I can pick up a lot. But I do like being there for support. And I think a lot of my practice is a lot of regular patients, and there are some horses I've been seeing for 15 years because I've opened up my practice a lot to sports horses and that's grown a lot in New Zealand on the South Island. It was primarily racehorses when I first started, but now it's just really opened up and people are just so open to it because they see the results.

Dr. Karen Becker:

Yeah. So, you must be incredibly busy. Incredibly busy, and yet it's just so wonderful. Yeah, I'm sure that people can see the difference between you as an equine practitioner, and when I say conventional equine, just your to – and horses, at least my peripheral feeling, is that they're so

incredibly sensitive and they're so intuitive, and that you adding energetics, that being able to help horses in a way that maybe you didn't learn in veterinary school is that missing piece to healing and recovery and assessment and prevention that had to literally open up a brand new world for you in terms of practice.

Dr. Lillian Bonner:

Yes, it did. I mean, I love it. It's so rewarding and the horses are actually really grateful for it if you can shift them, and their nervous systems are really open to it. They're very kinesthetic. So yeah, I can't write it enough. And it's getting really, really popular now among veterinarians to incorporate it.

Dr. Karen Becker:

That also has to be quite inspiring for you that you probably have a lot of your colleagues at least asking, "Hey" – the interest is growing because the need is so profound and it's really wonderful that you're as busy as you are. For the people that might be lucky enough, Dr. Lillian, to be in your area, what is your website? Where could people go to learn more about what you do? Is there a website or social media? Where would people go to be able to look, maybe even get inspired as to what you are doing that they could potentially look for a practitioner in their area?

Dr. Lillian Bonner:

Well, at the moment, I don't have a website. I had one years ago. But I am on social media under Lillian Bonner of Balanced Beings Integrated Veterinary Medicine. I'm not that active, I have to admit, on social media, but my daughter is actually going to design a website for me, so I need to get going on that I guess in the next few months. There are resources, like if you're in North America, you can go to different websites where they will provide practitioners in your area, like Options for Animals, that's chiropractors that have been trained, that would include veterinarians and chiropractors. And the Chi Institute trains in acupuncture. I'd have to probably put together a list. In this part of the world, there's Australasia Animal Biomechanical Medicine, and the Chi Institute actually has opened up branches in Australia now. And IVAS (International Veterinary Acupuncture Society) is another one for acupuncture. That's a start. I mean, there's also herbs, there [are] practitioners in Australia that are running CVIT (College of Veterinary Integrated Therapies). There's just so much now, it just opened up so much in the last 15 years or in the last decade, really. It's just incredible.

Dr. Karen Becker:

Yeah, that's awesome. And especially the fact that the interest from our conventional colleagues is also growing and expanding. That's also quite exciting to see. When you get up in the morning, what do you love most about your job?

Dr. Lillian Bonner:

I love the relationships. I really love the trust that clients put in my hands. They're really, really open with me after we establish that trust. And I really love the relationships I have with my patients because I often see them for years sometimes, sometimes not. But a lot of them I do see for years. I mean, there's been horses that I worked on when they were racing and then I'll actually run into them later when they've been retired to be a tracking horse. Or a sport horse,

and I'll run into them again, I'll recognize them. Or sometimes people will sell a horse, and this mainly happens with sport horses, and I follow them to their new home and I continue to work with them. So yeah, I really, really love the relationship.

Dr. Karen Becker:

Yeah, that's wonderful. So I really admire you for lots of reasons, but I don't work on any large animals, and I know you're passionate about all animals, but it's just really beautiful that you've kind of honed out – you've followed your passion for equine medicine and made it this fully functional with multimodal practice, with a lot of ways that you're able to radically improve the health and wellbeing of horses. It's really wonderful. If you could tell the world one thing or if you would want the world to know one thing, Lillian, what would it be?

Dr. Lillian Bonner:

Well, that was such a big question, but I think the way – what I've learned from, well, life and this practice is I think the truth lies in the middle. I'm all about balance and everything has a purpose. So even conventional medicine, at the most conventional you can get, will have a purpose, but you can often balance that with, really, alternative, and that can bring you back into balance. But the integrative where you're balancing both, I think that's very powerful if you have the awareness of both sides of it and you can just embody that and bring it in. I think that's where the truth lies in everything. If you look at any aspect of life, really, the truth often is somewhere in the middle.

And animals, there's a huge thing with the human-animal bond. I know this is like two things, but I think the responsibility that we have as stewards of these animals, whether you're training them, riding them, caring for them, you can get so much from that relationship. They get a lot, but they're on their own journey as well. They have their own consciousness. And if you're open to it, you can – they'll bring people in themselves, and it opens you up and it opens them up. So, it's just been really nice to be able to witness that.

Dr. Karen Becker:

Well, I am so incredibly thankful that Karen took the time to nominate you. I'm grateful for the work that you're doing to help horses heal emotionally, physically, energetically. I also am very thankful that you are seeing growth in this area when it comes to other practitioners, not only so we collectively are able to provide better support to horses, but that it's growing our integrative community as practitioners in a way that allows pet parents, horse owners, better access to the care that these amazing animals so desperately need. And so, all the way around it's wonderful, and I appreciate you taking time to share with me and everyone listening and watching the great work that you're doing. Thank you.

Dr. Lillian Bonner:

Thank you. Thank you for inviting me.