



The Veterinary Chiropractic Learning Centre

Course Outline and Background Document

**Small Animal Neuroanatomical Acupuncture
for Animal Chiropractors**

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**Large Animal Neuroanatomical Acupuncture
for Animal Chiropractors**

Advancing Professional Standards and Collaborative Animal Healthcare

Executive Summary

The Veterinary Chiropractic Learning Centre (VCLC) has developed a detailed curriculum to address the evolving needs of animal chiropractic practice and to meet public demand for safe, effective animal acupuncture services provided by qualified professionals. This document outlines the VCLC's professional position on animal acupuncture delivered by trained animal chiropractors, provides background on regulatory discussions, and describes the structure and educational standards of our Small and Large Animal Neuroanatomical Acupuncture certification programs.

The VCLC's goal is to promote the highest level of professional education, uphold rigorous standards of care, support animal welfare, and advocate for collaborative, evidence-informed animal healthcare. This document also addresses common misconceptions regarding the use of acupuncture by chiropractors, highlighting the strong educational, ethical, and regulatory foundations that govern this practice.

The VCLC's Position Statement on Animal Acupuncture

Introduction

The VCLC has offered a nationally and internationally recognized post-graduate training program for chiropractors and veterinarians at the introductory and continuing education levels for almost 20 years. Our Basic Program teaches the science and art of animal chiropractic, focusing on the controlled act of spinal and extremity joint manipulation to improve animal mobility, performance, and quality of life for both large and small animals. The program is approved by the Animal Chiropractic Certification Commission (ACCC) of the American Veterinary Chiropractic Association (AVCA). Animal chiropractors are regulated professionals and have safely delivered chiropractic care for animals in Ontario for over 26 years.

Qualified chiropractors and physiotherapists have used acupuncture as an adjunct therapy for human and animal patients for many years. The use of acupuncture as an adjunctive tool requires a high degree of skill and carries some risk, as does spinal manipulation. When performed by trained and licensed practitioners using sterile needles, acupuncture is considered a safe procedure with minimal risk. However, it is important to know potential risks and considerations, such as any intervention. These risks are mitigated when performed by well-trained, experienced, qualified, and regulated practitioners. In Ontario, there are educational and regulatory standards for chiropractors providing acupuncture to ensure its safe and competent delivery under the chiropractic license. Similar high standards also apply to delivering chiropractic care to animals within the chiropractic scope of practice.

Position Statement:

When practiced by qualified professionals within ethical and regulatory guidelines, animal acupuncture can significantly enhance animal mobility, health, and quality of life. It should be integrated responsibly into animal chiropractic practice as part of a comprehensive treatment

approach and within the chiropractic scope of practice. Overall, acupuncture is considered safe when performed by trained professionals, and serious complications are very rare. Animal chiropractors, certified in human and animal acupuncture, provide safe and effective acupuncture therapy to animals in Ontario. This position statement underscores the importance of promoting standards that uphold the highest level of care and respect for animal welfare, a value we all share.

Benefits of Animal Acupuncture:

1. **Pain management:** Acupuncture is widely recognized for its effectiveness in managing pain associated with neuromusculoskeletal dysfunction in human and animal patients. Seminal research using an animal model discusses two pain-relieving mechanisms [1].
2. **Complementary Therapy:** Animal acupuncture provides holistic care that complements conventional veterinary care while respecting owners' choice, access, and preferences for the best outcomes for their pets.
3. **Adjunctive Modality:** Acupuncture is a legitimate, widely accepted form of therapy in certain conditions and has been used as an adjunct in chiropractic and other allied animal professions practices for many years.
4. **Improvement of Quality of Life:** Acupuncture can enhance an animal's overall well-being by improving function, reducing pain and improving mobility.
5. **Safety:** When performed correctly by well-trained, qualified, regulated practitioners, acupuncture has virtually no side effects and minimal adverse effects [2, 3].

Ethical Considerations:

1. **Qualified practitioners:** Animal acupuncture should only be performed by trained veterinarians or qualified and regulated animal health practitioners trained in animal acupuncture techniques, such as animal chiropractors or animal physiotherapists.
2. **Informed Consent:** Similar to chiropractic care of animals, consent must be obtained from the animal's owner or caretaker before starting acupuncture treatment.
3. **Patient-Centred Care:** Practitioners must prioritize the animal's welfare and ensure that treatments are administered in a safe, sanitary, and compassionate manner.

Professional Standards:

1. **Training and Certification:** Practitioners must undergo extensive training in chiropractic, animal chiropractic, human acupuncture, and animal acupuncture from programs recognized by their regulatory bodies. They must also adhere to all Professional Standards of Care set out by their regulatory bodies.
2. **Evidence-based practice:** The use of acupuncture should be based on sound clinical reasoning and supported by scientific evidence where available.
3. **Continuing Education:** Practitioners should engage in continuing education to stay updated on advancements in acupuncture research and techniques

BACKGROUND

Acupuncture is an ancient therapeutic practice that involves inserting fine, solid needles into specific points on a patient's body to support health, alleviate symptoms, and improve function. The VCLCs position statement provides guidance on animal acupuncture performed by trained and licensed animal chiropractors. It addresses the benefits, ethical considerations, and professional standards for animal chiropractors.

The *Animal Neuroanatomical Acupuncture for Animal Chiropractors* course provides continuing education for animal chiropractors in acupuncture who already provide acupuncture to their human patients. It is designed to complement their animal chiropractic service to pet owners, meeting public demand for qualified care by regulated professionals. This course serves as a transition course for animal chiropractors to learn how to apply their acupuncture skills and knowledge to their animal patients as an adjunctive procedure in animal chiropractic practice, not a stand-alone intervention. It takes a neuroanatomical or Westernized approach, recognizing foundational aspects of Traditional Chinese Medicine, TCM) and follows guidelines established by the World Health Organization (WHO). Please note, however, that this is not a TCM-based course.

Chiropractors with training and certification in human acupuncture techniques and who are additionally credentialed in animal chiropractic and animal acupuncture are competent and capable of administering needling techniques to manage neuromusculoskeletal disorders in animal patients within their scope of practice, as they have done for several years in Ontario.

Acupuncture, electroacupuncture and laser acupuncture are physical modalities commonly used to address neuromusculoskeletal disorders in chiropractic practice. Chiropractors use clinical reasoning based on assessment findings and the best available evidence to select the interventions and therapies used within their treatment plan. Treatment effectiveness is evaluated via outcome-based measures, which inform the selection of interventions throughout the duration of treatment.

Acupuncture has been utilized as a chiropractic intervention in Canada since the 1970s. In recent years, chiropractors have also incorporated additional stimulation techniques, such as electroacupuncture and laser acupuncture. Chiropractors are authorized to use the "Doctor" title in providing patient care and communicating a diagnosis within the chiropractic scope of practice. Chiropractors have a strong background in anatomy, physiology, biomechanics, physical evaluation, clinical reasoning and diagnosis. They are also highly trained in when to refer to primary health care providers and when an integrated approach is appropriate.

Animal chiropractic training programs allow chiropractors to learn animal anatomy, animal conditions, pathologies, etc., enabling chiropractors to transfer their chiropractic skills and knowledge to an animal patient. Many educational resources exist for chiropractors to learn how to practice acupuncture on people in Canada and worldwide. Additional courses and resources are available for chiropractors to learn to localize acupoints on animals. All combined education gives chiropractors the skills and knowledge to utilize acupuncture techniques on their animal chiropractic patients safely and effectively within their scope of practice.

Resources

1. College of Chiropractors of Ontario (CCO) relevant Standards of Practice: Chiropractic Scope of Practice (S-001), Chiropractic Care of Animals (S-009), Acupuncture (S-017) <https://cco.on.ca/members-of-cco/standard-of-practice/>
2. CCOs Searchable Online Animal Chiropractic Public Registry: <https://cco.ca.thentiacloud.net/webs/cco/register/?t=1>
3. Regulation (107/96) of the *Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991 (RHPA)* to perform acupuncture, a procedure performed on tissue below the dermis, in accordance with Acupuncture Standard (S-017) and within the chiropractic scope of practice.
4. Guidelines on basic training and safety in acupuncture. World Health Organization (WHO), 1999 [4]
5. The Animal Rehab Division (ARD) published Position Statement and submission on *Acupuncture and Dry Needling of Animal Patients by Physiotherapists Engaged in Animal Rehabilitation Practice, Accepted February 2017* <https://physiotherapy.ca/app/uploads/2022/07/ard-acup-positionstatement.pdf>

Update: Current Status of Animal Acupuncture Discussions with the College of Veterinarians of Ontario (CVO):

Important developments have addressed the College of Veterinarians' (CVO) previous concerns regarding the perceived lack of accessible, specific training in animal acupuncture for animal chiropractors in North America (such training was previously available primarily in Europe). Recent discussions have emphasized the growing public demand for acupuncture services provided within the scope of trained animal chiropractors, particularly in light of increasing pressures on the veterinary system. Key considerations now include:

1. **Public Demand and Access to Care:** Pet owners continue to seek therapies like acupuncture for their animals due to their perceived effectiveness and minimal side effects compared to traditional medications. Qualified animal chiropractors trained in acupuncture techniques have become an increasingly important option to help meet this demand.
2. **Training and Qualifications:** Qualified animal chiropractors complete extensive education and certification training in animal chiropractic care. In addition, they undertake specialized training for both human and animal patients to safely and competently administer acupuncture treatments within their scope of practice.
3. **Support for the Overloaded Veterinary System:** Ontario's veterinary system remains under strain. Integrating qualified animal chiropractors trained in acupuncture helps alleviate this burden by providing additional therapeutic options and reducing wait times for specific MSK treatments.
4. **Pet Owners' Right to Choose:** Pet owners value having options for their pets' care. Acupuncture, when delivered by trained providers, offers a valuable adjunctive therapy, especially when conventional treatments have limitations or side effects.
5. **Regulatory Framework:** Modern regulatory healthcare frameworks increasingly recognize unique scopes of practice that prioritize patient-centred care. Qualified practitioners, including animal chiropractors trained in acupuncture, can contribute meaningfully to animal healthcare within appropriate regulations and guidelines. The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care promotes the principle of 'shared scopes of

practice' among regulated health professionals, encouraging collaboration where practitioners are appropriately trained and competent. This regulatory philosophy supports the involvement of qualified, regulated animal chiropractors trained in acupuncture as part of a collaborative model of animal healthcare.

6. **Collaborative Care:** Recognizing the expertise, unique scope of practice, and skills of animal chiropractors fosters collaboration between animal care providers, including veterinarians and animal chiropractors. This collaborative approach ensures that pets receive comprehensive care, integrating conventional veterinary medicine and complementary therapies like acupuncture.

Summary:

Qualified animal chiropractors have been safely providing animal acupuncture services to Ontario pet owners for many years, under the regulatory oversight of the CCO. Their role complements, rather than competes with, conventional veterinary care. The addition of Ontario-based, scope-specific training programs, such as the VCLC's animal acupuncture certification, addresses prior concerns regarding training accessibility and ensures that animal chiropractors can continue to offer high-quality, evidence-informed care within their scope of practice.

VCLC encourages regulatory bodies to continue supporting collaborative, patient-centred healthcare models that recognize the valuable contributions of qualified, regulated professionals to animal health and welfare.

VCLC's Small & Large Animal Neuroanatomical Acupuncture Certification Programs

Course Description

These courses are designed to transition qualified animal chiropractors trained and licensed to perform acupuncture on humans to safely and effectively adapt their knowledge to their animal patients as an adjunct therapy within their professional scope. The courses use a Western neuroanatomical approach to acupuncture with a TCM foundation, but are not TCM-based courses. Participants will learn needling techniques, point localizations, and practical skills for small or large animal patients.

By the end of the course, participants will have performed acupuncture on ten animal patients with a strong focus on safety and refinement of needle skills. The curriculum also includes reviews of relevant evidence-based research articles and the discussion of case studies.

The course material and examinations comprise a **minimum of 43 hours** of learning. Enrollment is restricted to chiropractors already certified in both animal chiropractic and human acupuncture.

Prerequisites

1. Doctor of Chiropractic (DC) Diploma or Degree from a CCE-accredited chiropractic institution

Rationale: This requirement ensures that course participants have met the educational requirements to practice chiropractic in North America. It also ensures that they understand, accept, and comply with the requirements, expectations, and standards of care for being a regulated health professional in Canada.

2. Current license and be in good standing with their provincial licensing body.

Rationale: Good standing with a licensing body is essential for ensuring legal compliance, maintaining professional credibility and trust, keeping up with new clinical developments, upholding ethical standards, and protecting public welfare. It signifies a commitment to excellence and accountability in one's profession.

3. Certificate in Animal Chiropractic from an AVCA or IVCA-approved program (minimum 210 hours of formal training)

Rationale: This ensures that the course participant has met the educational requirements to practice chiropractic on animals. It ensures that participants have successfully completed the animal crossover program to apply their knowledge and skills from humans to their animal patients.

4. Completed specific acupuncture training that complies with their governing bodies requirements (i.e. consistent with the WHO minimum of 200 hours of formal training)

Rationale: To practice acupuncture as an adjunctive therapy in the context of chiropractic practice, chiropractors must have completed specific acupuncture training as taught in the core curriculum, post-graduate curriculum or continuing education division of one or more colleges accredited by the Council on Chiropractic Education Inc., or an accredited Canadian or American college/university, or in an accredited school of acupuncture. This position adopts the WHO Guidelines that a combined (clinical and academic minimum of 200 hours of formal training is required for those members who intend to use acupuncture as an adjunctive procedure in their primary practice. Additionally, Chiropractors who use acupuncture must demonstrate clinical competency in any diagnostic or therapeutic procedure they use in practice. As such, qualified practitioners are expected to participate in ongoing education activities on the performance of acupuncture as an adjunctive therapy within the chiropractic scope of practice.

5. Proof of understanding of the Standards of Care for Scope of Practice (S-001), the Chiropractic Care of Animals (S-009), and Acupuncture (S-017) or applicable provincial standards.

Rationale: Participants are required to sign a document that records their understanding of these relevant standards, which can become part of their Professional Portfolio and Reflective Practice Analysis.

6. Professional liability insurance specific to acupuncture

Rationale: Chiropractors who provide acupuncture must provide evidence, satisfactory to their licensing body, of carrying professional liability insurance in the applicable minimum aggregate amount per year. Many insurance providers, such as the Canadian Chiropractic Protective Association (CCPA), offer acupuncture coverage for human and animal patients provided by qualified chiropractors that protect both the doctor and the animal owner.

Course Overview:

The VCLC Animal Acupuncture Courses for Animal Chiropractors consist of four parts. They are as follows:

Part I: Species-Appropriate Anatomy, Biomechanics, and Chiropractic Care

Description:

Species-Appropriate Anatomy, Biomechanics and Chiropractic Care is a self-paced, prerequisite section comprising several asynchronous lectures delivered by esteemed VCLC instructors via our online teaching platform. This module is a prerequisite for the practical component of the program.

This section provides a relevant review of animal anatomy, biomechanics, neurological function, orthopedic conditions, gait and locomotion, and their applications in chiropractic care. Additional topics include the safe and stress-free handling of animals, occupational health considerations, legal issues, professional boundaries, and integrating animal chiropractic and acupuncture principles through case study. This section also ensures that previous animal chiropractic graduates are updated with the most current information relevant to practice.

Upon completion of Part I, participants will be able to:

- Identify and describe the anatomical structures of the head, neck, forelimb, thoracolumbar region, pelvis, and hindlimb
- Identify visceral anatomy to ensure acupuncture safety
- Apply anatomical knowledge to interpret the functional significance
- Describe the structure and function of the brachial and lumbosacral plexes in small or large animals, reviewing common injuries or conditions affecting them and their clinical implications
- Identify common spinal conditions in relevant species, including degenerative, traumatic, and developmental disorders and describe the clinical signs associated with each condition
- Explain the role chiropractic care can play in orthopedic and neurological conditions in companion animals
- Discuss the rationale for chiropractic interventions in specific conditions (e.g., joint dysfunctions, nerve impingements, postural or conformational deficits)
- Analyze normal species-appropriate gait patterns and locomotor mechanics
- Identify deviations from normal gait and their implications for musculoskeletal health.
- Identify zoonotic diseases that may pose risks in animal chiropractic practice.

- Identify conditions outside the chiropractic scope of practice that require referral to a veterinarian
- Describe preventive measures to minimize zoonotic disease transmission.
- Identify potential hazards in the clinical environment that may affect the safety of companion animals and practitioners.
- Develop protocols for safe handling and restraint of animals during chiropractic sessions
- Summarize the historical foundations and cultural origins of acupuncture and Traditional Chinese Medicine
- Explain neurofunctional mechanisms of action for acupuncture, including neuromodulation and anatomical levels of stimulation
- Describe non-needling techniques for acupoint stimulation and identify anatomical safety considerations for animal acupuncture
- Evaluate case studies where acupuncture was used for specific conditions in animals as an adjunct to chiropractic care
- Analyze treatment protocols and outcomes based on acupuncture principles.
- Discuss the integration of acupuncture with other therapeutic modalities in chiropractic care

Lesson Outline for Part I:

(species-appropriate content supplied)

- Lesson 1: Anatomy of the head, neck and proximal forelimb
- Lesson 2: Dissection of the head and neck and proximal forelimb
- Lesson 3: Anatomy of the thoracolumbar region and biomechanics
- Lesson 4: Anatomy of the pelvis and proximal hindlimb
- Lesson 5: Dissection of the pelvic muscles and proximal hindlimb
- Lesson 6: Anatomy of the extremities
- Lesson 7: Functional Review of the Brachial Plexus in Animals
- Lesson 8: Functional Review of the Lumbosacral Plexus in Animals
- Lesson 9: Canine or Equine Spine Conditions
- Lesson 10: Orthopedic and Neurological conditions and the role of chiropractic care
- Lesson 11: Canine or Equine Gait and Locomotion
- Lesson 12: Zoonotic Concerns for the Animal Chiropractor
- Lesson 13. Ensuring the Safety of Animals and Practitioners
- Lesson 14. Foundations of Acupuncture: History, Mechanisms, and Neuromodulation
- Lesson 15. Non-Needling Techniques and Anatomical Safety in Animal Acupuncture
- Lesson 16. Animal Acupuncture Case Studies

The competency-based content in Part I consists of a minimum of **18 hours** of structured online learning.

Part II: Research Articles

(Competency-Based)

Description:

This section focuses on developing participants' critical appraisal skills and deepening their understanding of the scientific basis of acupuncture through the review and synthesis of key research literature.

All candidates must read, summarize, and synthesize key acupuncture-related research articles and prepare an assignment based on their review. Participants are expected to demonstrate an in-depth understanding of acupuncture research and integrate their knowledge into broader clinical concepts and applications. A grading rubric will be provided to guide completion of this task, along with a quiz to assess competency.

This section requires a minimum of **5 hours** of self-directed learning.

PART III: PRACTICAL PORTION

Description:

The hands-on portion of VCLCs Small or Large Animal Neuroanatomical Acupuncture program for Animal Chiropractors is a two-day intensive practical course in Paris, Ontario. This interactive component maintains a small group setting and is supervised by experienced, qualified animal chiropractors. Completion of Part I is required before attending the hands-on practical training.

This portion of the course focuses on developing competency in safe and effective palpation, localization, and needling of acupuncture points on animal patients, clinical reasoning, treatment planning, and integration of acupuncture as an adjunct within chiropractic care.

Learning Objectives for Part III

Upon completion of the Practical Portion, participants will be able to:

- Develop skills in palpation techniques to locate acupuncture points on animal subjects
- Accurately localize specific acupoints using anatomical landmarks and palpation
- Safely and effectively needle acupuncture points in a species-appropriate manner
- Apply clinical reasoning skills to case presentations involving animal acupuncture
- Identify conditions suitable for acupuncture treatment as an adjunct to chiropractic care
- Discuss treatment protocols, evaluate responses, and modify plans based on individual patient outcomes.

Day 1 and Day 2 Schedule

(8.5 hours each day)

Lesson 1: Review of safety considerations and discussion on opening points

Lesson 2: Practical instruction and needling practice for 'opening points'

Lesson 3: Acupuncture points of the hip, stifle, hock, tarsus, and foot

Lesson 4: Practical instruction of the hip, stifle, hock, tarsus and foot

Lesson 5: Acupuncture points of the spine and pelvis

Lesson 6: Practical instruction of the spine and pelvis

Lesson 7: Acupuncture points of the head and neck, shoulder, elbow, carpus, and foot

Lesson 8: Practical instruction of the head and neck, shoulder, elbow, carpus, and foot

Lesson 9: Case studies and discussion

Additional Components:

- Q&A Session
- Written and Practical Competency Testing

Part IV: Case Study Assignment

(Competency-Based)

This final assignment reinforces participants' ability to apply acupuncture principles within real-world clinical scenarios, integrating acupuncture as an adjunct to animal chiropractic care.

Description:

Participants must complete a case study assignment demonstrating their ability to integrate acupuncture into a clinical treatment plan for an animal chiropractic patient. The case study must include patient history, clinical assessment, acupuncture point selection rationale, treatment outcomes, and reflective analysis of the case.

A grading rubric will be provided to guide the assignment structure and evaluation criteria. Successful completion of the case study assignment is required to meet the competency standards for certification.

Competency-Based Assessment

Participants must successfully complete the following assessments to demonstrate competency in animal neuroanatomical acupuncture techniques:

- Practical Examination: Assessment of point localization and safe needling technique
- Written Examination: Competency-based assessment incorporating Parts I, II, & III
- Case Study Assignment Part IV: Due 4 weeks post-course completion
- Minimum Passing Grade: 75%

Certification Requirements

To receive a Certificate in Small or Large Animal Neuroanatomical Acupuncture, participants must successfully complete all program requirements, including:

- Meet all prerequisite requirements
- Complete the online course (Part I)
- Submit the Acupuncture Research Article Assignment (Part II)
- Attend and participate in the Hands-On Practical Course (Part III)
- Complete the Case Study Assignment (Part IV)
- Successfully pass the written and practical competency assessments

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