

Holistic Vet Works Miracles

To holistic vet Marty Goldstein, no dog is a lost cause.

Denise Flaim

When he was a student at Cornell University's vet school in the early 1970s, Marty Goldstein wore a black-and-white button around the Ithaca, N.Y., campus.

"Question Authority," it proclaimed.

Now, three decades later, the button is gone, replaced by a funky dog pin secured to Goldstein's exuberant retriever-print shirt. But its philosophy lingers.

If veterinary medicine has a poster boy for the road less traveled, it is Martin Goldstein, DVM, as he is formally identified on the cover of his best-selling 1999 book, *The Nature of Animal Healing* (now in soft cover from Ballantine). Dubbed a "miracle worker" by *Forbes* magazine, 60-year-old "Dr. Marty" has tended to a list of celebrity clients ranging from chef Wolfgang Puck to actors Kelly Preston and Steven Seagal, to the occasional blueblood.

In the past, media-savvy clients have nudged Goldstein into the limelight. He helped the cat of a *Random House* editor survive cancer for two years without chemo, which led to his book deal. And things are no different these days. After putting her French Bulldogs Sharkey and Francesca, and Chow Chow Paw-Paw under Goldstein's care, Martha Stewart landed him on satellite radio: "Ask Martha's Vet" debuted in January and airs Monday nights at 8 p.m. EST on the Sirius network.

Goldstein's message is clear — and, in some quarters, controversial. Traditional veterinary medicine, with its focus on symptom-suppressing drugs, repeated vaccinations, and processed foods, has robbed animals of the most powerful tool in the fight against disease — the healing power of their own bodies.

Nowhere, Goldstein argues, is this more apparent than in the skyrocketing cases of cancer — the ultimate expression of autoimmune disease, in which a weakened and confused body begins attacking itself. His practice sees about a dozen cases every week — a literal epidemic.

"According to a Morris Animal Foundation survey, approximately 50 percent of disease-related deaths in dogs are due to cancer," says Goldstein, who has a one- to two-month waiting list for new patients. "It used to be a disease of the old, but now we're seeing much more of it in the young than we ever did, and it's not because we're better at diagnosing it. The real true healer is the natural matrix in the body."

Instead of turning to external therapies such as chemotherapy and radiation, Goldstein looks within, analyzing his patients' blood profiles and prescribing nutritional supplements, herbs, and homeopathic remedies to help their bodies return to balance and fight the disease themselves. He estimates that about half of his cancer cases see "some kind of notable response," whether it's tumor regression, greater longevity than was predicted, or increased quality of life.

Tucked amid a rural landscape of tumbling fieldstone walls, the Smith Ridge Veterinary Center in South Salem, N.Y., hardly seems the epicenter of last-resort veterinary medicine. The average client at Smith Ridge travels almost 600 miles to arrive at the folksy waiting room, with its pine-paneled walls and papier-mâché dog art, for an appointment with Goldstein or one of the three associate vets he has personally trained.

In an exam room that might not even qualify as a suitable walk-in closet for his most well-heeled clients, Goldstein sees his first patients of the day. Nurit and Bob Shamis of N.Y. sit on a teak bench as their three toy dogs jump from lap to lap. Ziggy, a 4-year-old Maltese, has some allergy issues. Jacky, a 5-year-old Poodle, is "neurotic," his owners admit, and in addition to trick knees, he has the occasional bout of reverse sneezing. Finally, there's apricot Poodle Rusty, 9, who has a heart murmur.

The Shamises are here, they say, as much to preserve their dogs' health as improve it.

"Hi, Ziggy," Goldstein says, holding the little white furball to his face. "I'm Marty."

Lanky, bordering on gaunt, Goldstein admits to getting only about three hours of sleep a day, as he reviews cases and sends e-mails into the wee hours of the night. To keep his energy up, he swigs what his staff has affectionately dubbed Monkey Vomit — a juiced concoction of banana, papaya, pear, coconut oil, sorbet, and juice, and a dash of whey-protein cappuccino. A beaded bracelet with the letters D-A-D hints at a recent life change — a second marriage and the arrival of three daughters, ages 2, 4, and 5.

The Shamises have booked the whole morning — roughly double the typical hour-long consult for which Goldstein charges \$420. As the husband makes notes on his Blackberry and his slim, raven-haired wife periodically clutches her dogs closer, Goldstein talks about the common veterinary practices that can steer dogs toward disease — first and foremost, overvaccination.

“It’s not that vaccines are bad, just that they’re not handled properly,” says Goldstein, noting that some studies have shown that vaccines such as parvovirus and distemper have a minimum duration of seven to 15 years — basically, a lifetime.

With small dogs like the Shamises’, dosage is another little-headed concern. “The average vaccine is 10 times the potency needed to challenge the immune system of a Great Dane,” Goldstein says. “For these guys, that’s more like 50 times what they need.”

Diet is next. In the wild, carnivores eat a very small amount of carbohydrates, maybe less than 5 percent, Goldstein notes, while “typical dry foods are greater than 50 percent carbohydrates.”

Preferring to keep grain content to a minimum, Goldstein is an advocate of raw diets in healthy animals who can handle them — at least four of his six animals at home prefer their meals carpaccio-style. “My Danny lived to 19 12 years old, in a breed where 85 percent get cancer,” Goldstein says, fishing a portrait of the handsome Golden Retriever from a nearby corner. Still — carbo, shmarbo — “because we don’t want to live in a bubble, once a week Danny and I went out for pizza.”

Before their visit is over, the Shamises go to the adjacent shop to pick out some new dog food, and Goldstein draws blood from all three dogs to see if there are any metabolic imbalances or deficiencies.

In the last several years, Goldstein says, he has seen a shift in the direction of the Shamises: a focus on wellness and prevention. But some clients still come because their animals are deep in crisis, and have not responded to conventional therapies. Indeed, the only reason Goldstein “went holistic” himself was because he was stricken with severe arthritis and bursitis in his mid-20s. “It was a thing of vanity and fear to save my own life,” he says of the degenerative disease that dogged him. “I was ridiculed and outcast not only by my fellow vets, but also by my friends.”

Stephen Sayegh of N.Y. looks at things from the opposite side of the fence. More than a year ago, his vet diagnosed 8-year-old Elsa with squamous-cell cancer — “the worst you can have.” Elsa, a precocious brown pit bull with a white blaze up her neck and a fondness for catching fish right out of the water at Sayegh’s oceanside home, was given three to six months to live, with chemotherapy and radiation.

Desperate for a cure, Sayegh went to one of the best-known veterinary oncologists in the area, who not only confirmed the prognosis, but predicted that within a month and a half, “there will be tumors popping up all over the place.”

By the time Sayegh brought Elsa to Smith Ridge, he was beyond defeated. “It took me 45 minutes just to break through to him,” Goldstein remembers. “Hope comes first, before treatment.”

Goldstein performed cryosurgery on the tumor, using liquid nitrogen to “freeze” the cancerous tissue in Elsa’s throat. Besides adding a raft of supplements to her diet, Sayegh switched her to an all-natural menu — organic filet mignon and chicken, as well as Alaskan salmon flown in from the West Coast.

The cancer receded, then returned twice before finally disappearing for good.

“The body has an amazing ability to heal — every cell in your body has the ability to replicate and heal,” Goldstein says, giving the credit to “Mother Nature and Father Common Sense. We just put the animals in the direction of health. It’s a process of life, not a treatment,” he says.

“It’s my opinion that the cancer fled her body — it was beaten by the nutrients, the love, the help,” says Sayegh, who estimates he has spent \$100,000 on Elsa so far, from her special diet and 40 different daily supplements to hiring a car

and driver for her every time he has a business meeting in Manhattan, so she is never alone.

Today, jaunty in a red-white-and-blue bandana and fashionable plaid collar, Elsa pads contentedly around the exam room, liberally dispensing kisses to Goldstein's two youngest daughters, who pop in en route to gymnastics class.

"She's pure love," says Sayegh, who has started to write a screenplay about Elsa. Every time she barks, "it's a gift," he says cheerily, because it is a reminder that the throat cancer is no longer there. "It blows your ear off."

Goldstein drags a big examination light into the room, and gently pries Elsa's mouth open. Inside, there is nothing but a big expanse of pink, healthy tissue — no sign of the cancer that was to have robbed Elsa of her life almost a year ago.

"When is it appropriate to get cocky with cancer?" Sayegh asks earnestly, as Elsa settles under the table for a snooze.

"Right now she's awesome," says Marty Goldstein, specialist in lost causes, turning the light off with a snap. "You can get a little cocky."

Denise Flaim is a DOG FANCY contributing editor, the pets columnist at Newsday, and author of *The Holistic Dog Book: Canine Care for the 21st Century* (Howell, 2003).

Listen to audio clips of Dr. Marty's advice for dog owners.