

Dr. Karen Becker Interviews Melissa Shelton, DVM

By Dr. Karen Becker

KB: Dr. Karen Becker

MS: Dr. Melissa Shelton

Introduction:

KB: Hi! This is Dr. Karen Becker, and I have a guest today that I'm very excited about. Dr. Melissa Shelton is here joining me, because I have felt very strongly about essential oils in veterinary medicine. But the frustration is, not all veterinarians view them as safe, as effective, or something that we should be really investigating. So, I have brought to this interview an expert in this field, and I'm so excited. Melissa, thank you so much for joining me.

MS: Thank you so much for having me.

KB: I'm very excited. I know that you have a tremendous amount of experience with essential oils. Tell me, how did you become involved with essential oils for animals?

MS: I initially got involved with essential oils actually not even for animals, but for my own children. We had specialized needs that required them to not have traditional medications or additives, dyes, things like that. So, I had just seen a community education class *[Laughs]* that said, "Natural remedies for colds, cough..." all those kind of stuff." I thought, "Okay, I'll bite." I went there and it was essential oils, so that kind of got me interested. I smelled them and I thought, "Wow! Wouldn't that be just great to be able to use them?"

I was already on the path of not using any type of chemical air freshener in our home or in our veterinary clinic. We were seeing actual bloodwork abnormalities in animals that the owners use a lot of air fresheners. When they would remove them, the bloodwork would go back to normal. So I was pretty excited to smell something that smelled very nice. *[Laughs]*

KB: Sure, of course.

MS: Yeah. That could potentially be used in the clinic, but wouldn't be harmful. I kind of started investigating a little bit along those routes of "Could I use these in the vet clinic and be safe?" And of course, I need to go on to the whole route of controversy.

KB: Of course. So, back up and tell me: I know that you were using it for your family. Did you... How long ago was this, 10 years ago?

MS: No. *[Laughs]* The funny thing was really... About 10 years ago, I was actually exposed to them. We ended up getting rid of my husband's warts with them.

KB: Oh.

MS: After we had tried everything under the sun to get rid of them. We couldn't, so we used clove oil, and it got rid of his warts.

KB: Cool! Yeah.

MS: Yeah! And I did nothing with them at that point. *[Laughs]*

KB: Okay. Sure.

MS: I literally still – 10 years later – have that same bottle of clove oil. It sat on my shelf. And of course, children are a huge driver.

KB: Sure.

MS: So as I soon as I was a “mama bear” and had to *[Laughs]* protect them from things that just burdened them.

KB: It's interesting. You and I have a similar background when it comes to essential oils. I was a wildlife rehabilitator. And 20 years ago, the woman who I apprenticed under said, “You know, if you have really stressed wild animals coming in, just put a few drops of very pure pharmaceutical grade lavender oil on a cotton ball, tape it outside of their cage, and you will see an overall calming effect.”

I have done this for years. I never gave it a second thought. It was tremendously effective. Then all of a sudden, I had people saying, “Oh my gosh, there's not a cat in the room when you're doing that right?”

MS: *[Laughs]*

KB: And I started thinking, “Oh my gosh! I don't want to hurt – I don't want to harm anything!” So, we have both kind of been under the influence of them until most recently. I would say that for me the last 10 years of other veterinarians saying, “Oh my goodness! You know, you got to be incredibly cautious using essential oils around animals.” Tell me, you probably have undergone those types of questions and concerns as well.

MS: Definitely. And they contacted me regularly and said, “How dare you even recommend that you could do these around cats?” Actually, to answer the previous question, I have been... It's been about three years now that I have actually used them, I would say, as a medical entity in the practice. With my own cats (I have about 13 cats in my home) – my own pets, and breeding as well at that time. I was really cautious to even run a diffuser.

KB: Yup.

MS: I would be watching my cats really carefully. Of course, as a vet, we have this great ability that I can run bloodwork whenever I want. *[Laughs]*

KB: Right.

MS: So I did. I did tons of bloodwork. What I kept noticing was that my Munchkin cat would continually go to the diffuser.

KB: Yup.

MS: She would lie next to it. She actually delivered kittens right next to it. And I thought, “You know, she’s probably smarter than we are.” *[Laughs]*

KB: Sure. Sure.

MS: I just continued to check bloodwork and urine and really monitored it closely. I could see that there was no abnormality happening, and I thought, “Okay.” We get a little more relaxed and kept going. Then you start to go, “Well, I think the cat probably wouldn’t lay right next to it if it just liked it.” *[Laughs]*

KB: Right. Have you had people contact you just because... I guess... I have even looked online. There’s just a tremendous amount of misinformation that is potentially stirring up hype and fear (I don’t want to say needlessly). But what have you found since you have become really passionate and really – I would consider – an expert on essential oils on animals? What have you found with the amount of vast information out there? Would you say that it’s misinformation or just unnecessary fear mongering?

MS: There’s a little bit of both. There have been some instances that I actually really kind of liked researching these reports of toxicity, because I’m very fascinated by them. I want to find out why is there a subset of people who can do certain things with oils, and then there’s another subset of people who absolutely, like they said, “I hope you don’t have a cat in the room!” You know?

KB: Right.

MS: I really found that it comes down to a quality issue. I think that’s very similar with all of veterinary medicine. I mean, we would certainly agree that if an animal is on a really poor grade of food, that we instantly want to change it to a better grade. We don’t outlaw all food. *[Laughs]*

KB: Right.

MS: We just pick a better food. To me, it became very obvious that it was just the same as the variations between a brand. I have a lot of brand preferences. As a holistic vet, I find that one product will be safer, more effective, or work better for my patients, and that’s what I’ll recommend.

In the essential oils, what I have been finding is that natural bandwagon was very powerful, so everybody wanted to jump on board, but they don't have any essential oil knowledge. If somebody wanted to make an ear cleaner all of a sudden and put in an oil in it, they had no idea how to evaluate the grade of the oil that was going within the product.

KB: Yup.

MS: I find that even with companies that are big warehouses for essential oils. I'll ask them some questions, and I'll realize that they don't really even realize what the testing involves.

KB: Sure.

MS: Or how to evaluate an oil at all. They're just a warehouse for it. There's so much misinformation. I truly have spoken first-hand with people who have had cats damaged by essential oils, so it does happen. It's not as common as what people would think, though. For what gets out there on the Internet, it's certainly... I have met thousands and thousands of people using them successfully, and can really only find very few that have had major problem with essential oils. It's generally a very huge misuse issue. *[Laughs]*

KB: That was my question. Would you say that those clients or people that have been referred to you that have had problems with essential oils, were you able to trace it back to a purity potency mishandling problem 100 percent of the time, most of the time, or what are you finding with animals that have had negative consequences from using essential oils?

MS: Yeah. I would say that it's 100 percent of the time. Of course, a lot of times people will contact me with a case that's not even... It was a friend of a friend or...

KB: Sure.

MS: The data is really poor out there, too. They often go, "I don't remember what kind of essential oil it was, but I got it at the drugstore" or little things like that, so it's very hard to trace back the exact things. But usually, if I know that they bought it at just any basic drugstore, I'm already pretty keyed up to what kind of quality it probably was.

KB: Sure.

MS: The five-dollar oils on the shelf are not going to be quite the same. *[Laughs]*

KB: Right.

MS: Yeah. I would say that the ones I can actually get information on, 100 percent of the time I can trace it back to either synthetic oils, poor-grade oils, a horrible misuse – like in one case, a bottle had spilled over, and the cat was basically covered in the essential oil.

KB: Oh.

MS: You know, no matter what kind of product you're doing, that's not going to be good.
[Laughs]

KB: Sure, of course. When you kind of look back on your kind of "evolution" with essential oils, does it feel to you like you were able to trace it back to one particular instance, where you became kind of ignitedly passionate, or do you think that it has just been a slow evolution of you seeing the results, and then feeling more confident in using them in your practice? Was it a slow or fast evolution?

MS: I would say that it kind of got fast all at once. I was instantly very drawn to them. I loved them. I had thought before that I couldn't be around them much I had like the smell sensitivities and different things from myself. I actually thought that I was allergic to essential oils before. It's kind of a funny evolution anyway.

But when I got around these very high-quality ones, I was just almost like energized and passionate about them. I read books from like cover to cover instantly. In a human sense, I was just... It was like, "Wow! This is my new modality." Then it really became... You know, as veterinarians, we all get a case that comes into the animal hospital that you are just stumped. You have nothing more to give them. *[Laughs]* You don't know where else to go.

[----- 10:00 -----]

So I started to get some of those cases presented just all at that same time, and the owners were just saying, "I am not giving up on this animal, so you better give me something else."

KB: Yup. Figure something out.

MS: Yeah. "You better come up with something." I said, "Well, you know honestly..."
[Laughs]

There were a couple of different situations, but the one that I loved the most right now is Cowboy the cat, who I just saw yesterday. He has upper motor neuron damage to his bladder and cannot urinate. I have been hospitalizing him over and over and over again, and she says, "I'm not giving up. We could solve this." She would have done anything. If there was a surgery to do or a university that could do anything to drain his bladder on a regular basis safely for him, she would have done it. I kept saying, "I just think it might be time to euthanize him," and she was like "No! No! No!" So I said, "Well, if this were a human, I would try these essential oils."

We sure did. He's the funniest case in the world, because he showed me over and over again. I actually freaked out several times, because she continued to do an essential oil remedy that I have expected to wean him off of daily, for like a month. I was certain when he came back for his bloodwork re-check that I was *[Laughs]* going to really, really dislike it, that it's going to be horrible and all these horrible things. I had my own doubt. His bloodwork was perfect, and I told

her to reduce. I think this was my clear statement in my head of “these things really work.” I said, “Go to every other day instead of daily,” and he relapsed.

KB: Interesting.

MS: Yeah. There was a clear connection with him. Okay, give him the essential oils, and he’s doing great. Take it away from him, and he has symptoms. *[Laughs]* It was just really cause and effect. I love those cause and effect relationships.

KB: You bet.

MS: We have been following his bloodwork. Now, he is actually getting it twice a day – essential oil topically, a big mixture of them actually – for over two years, and his bloodwork is just spectacular. He just came in yesterday to have it re-checked and he’s actually regaining some neurologic function.

KB: Wow.

MS: It’s just an amazing (case). That’s one of my all-time favorite cases.

KB: How soon into essential oil therapy did he begin urinating? Can he urinate on his own now completely?

MS: Not completely. He still maintains a slightly larger bladder, but it releases easier. We’ll actually see now that when he sleeps, it will actually release.

KB: Okay.

MS: Which I love because that neural tone is actually releasing somewhat.

KB: Sure.

MS: He can urinate actually a puddle instead of just dribbles now. He’s getting that little panniculus response – a little twitching of their hair and their skin down his back.

KB: Great, sure.

MS: When we pet him, he actually has that. And he can twitch his tail just ever so slightly. What we saw with him was that I was ending up having to hospitalize him almost monthly to kind of relieve that blockage. He would have a cantaloupe-sized bladder.

KB: Oh.

MS: It was just horrible. The catharization, the hospitalization, getting him feel better, and then back home he goes, and within a month, he was back again. On the oils, I didn’t have to repeat that. He was actually maintained for over a year without a repeat hospitalization.

KB: Oh. So, the owner just has to be ecstatic. Something so non-expensive and so non-invasive has been able to dramatically improve his quality of life.

MS: Right. I mean, we were spending (or she has spent) a fraction of even one of the hospitalizations on what we're doing for him.

KB: Sure. That's wonderful. Was there a specific case like that previously that kind of helped you go against the grain of traditional – not traditional treatment, but did you find initially that you were using essential oils more for cases that you didn't know where else to turn, whereas now you're using it as a primary care choice?

MS: Right. Yeah. That was my very first cat case that I used oils on. I would say, Cowboy is like my most favorite, but my very first was my own cat. Because I would never do anything for a patient that I wouldn't do for myself or my own (pet).

My own outdoor cat – we have a kind of kitty rescue and stuff, so we have some outdoor farm cat. She came stumbling up the driveway completely neurologic, and I had actually... I drew up the euthanasia solution quite honestly. My husband says, "Well, you have actually been wanting to try essential oils. You know, maybe you want to try these before you put it to sleep?"

KB: Yup.

MS: I thought, "Well, that, yeah. *[Laughs]* I suppose, I could."

KB: Sure.

MS: The end result in my mind was the veterinarian going, "Okay. If everybody's right that I'm going to kill this cat, then what's...?"

KB: Sure.

MS: What's the difference anyway?

KB: Sure. Yeah.

MS: I could either inject her with a fatal injection or I could give her a chance with some essential oils. And I always only try the things that I knew other people have done in cats before with good results.

KB: Sure.

MS: I wasn't like just trying to be experimental on her. But we did. We did what we call a "kitty raindrop" on her, and within two of those doses she was 100 percent normal.

KB: Oh. How exciting. How exciting.

MS: Yeah. For me, I always go after that data of “Did that truly do something for her?” or was it just “She would have gotten better on her own”? *[Laughs]*

KB: In those situations where if you were on the concept of euthanasia, and you had a kitty that regained enough quality – that was out of the question.

MS: Yeah.

KB: How fabulous that you turned into that. Are you finding that you have specific recommendations? I mean a lot of famous people get excited about essential oils, so they have used them, let’s say, for cleaning in their homes or for something personally, and they’re interested in using essential oils for their pets. What’s your recommendation in terms of how to get started without, above all, doing no harm?

MS: Right. You know, people kind of get a little weird about this, but I do have a brand that I have really become comfortable with. To make sure that the essential oil’s quality is very good, I think that’s my most important thing. And I have a lot of people that contact me, asking, “What about this brand? What about that brand?” and I’ll contact the company. I have probably evaluated about 25 different companies now.

There are some good small companies out there that provide what I can term as medical-grade oils, because I use them medically. But I find that it’s not always a really consistent thing across the board or every single one of their oils that they carry is in that manner. So, I often tell people, “You know, what’s in your cleaning product is toilet bowl-grade essential oils.” *[Laughs]*

KB: Right.

MS: They’re not going to pay a lot of money for a medical-grade essential oil to put in your toilet bowl cleaner.

KB: Right. Yup.

MS: We have to be really cautious with which ones we’re getting, so I do. I don’t know if you want me exactly to name the brand, but I have one that they very consistently put the research into the desire to use them medically. They test multiple times with independent labs. So, that’s what I tell people. I said, “I know for sure in my hands, these ones have been safe and effective, and there are thousands of people using them.” I feel very comfortable with that.

KB: Talk a little bit about you having some great information on your website, www.oilyvet.com. Talk a little bit about how you have been passionate about this that you kind of created an essential oil website basically for pets, which is exciting!

MS: Yeah. I spoke at an essential oil convention and then, of course, what happened was everybody has got questions for you. You’ll find that in a convention, somebody will walk up to you ask you one question, then three people later with the same question again.

KB: Sure. Sure.

MS: So I really figured out that, “Gosh, I need to duplicate myself. I need to record some things and, of course, I could just record myself and everybody could just listen to it.” It became more of a passion to teach classes to more people or put information out there that could reach a hundred people at a time instead of one person at a time.

KB: Of course, you bet.

MS: That’s where my website is kind of directed towards now. It’s to be able to help everybody with this information more efficiently. Before I was having people drive from other states to our vet clinic just to have the advice on the essential oils. They’re very passionate about it and they needed that information, so my fun goal now is to get it to everywhere.

KB: Which is wonderful, and your website does a great job of reaching out, not only answering some of those questions that I think we all have about safety and efficacy, but just the scope of which essential oils can be used. I was just interested a couple of years ago, when of course, the MRSA issue came out. I really believe that one of our only last resorts in really effectively treating MRSA is essential oils.

MS: Oh, they are. We have clear cases that have responded to essential oils when nothing else will work. Plants change. They have been around for millions of years. Every single little distillation of essential oils is slightly different from the last one, and we can’t get that in pharmacology. They have to – by definition – be the same every time they make them. Since the plants are slightly different, plus they’re way smarter than any kind of laboratory... *[Laughs]*

KB: Yeah. Yup.

MS: They modify. Every year, there’s a little different water supplied to the plant. The essential oil is slightly different. That variation creates a situation where you can’t develop resistance to it.

KB: This exciting research, the more we learn, the more exciting the essential oil research becomes. Have you seen any cases where you are hesitant – I guess – to use essential oils, or do you just modify how you use them?

[----- 20:00 -----]

MS: Yeah. Now, it’s actually one of those modalities where I go, “Boy, if somebody tries to take it away from me, I don’t know if I’d want to practice veterinary medicine anymore.”

KB: Yeah.

MS: It’s kind of like nutrition. I know that you and I are huge in nutrition. If you could not modify a pet’s diet, your job would become incredibly difficult.

KB: Yes.

MS: For me, it's like a pair. I always start with diet anyways. But if I can't do diet and I can't get a little bit of essential oils into the case, it feels very empty. *[Laughs]*

KB: Sure.

MS: You know they are so powerful. They are so amazing. It's just such a fun thing, and I have been... For me, it's a neat realization to look out in nature, and realize how much we would actually be exposed to essential oils on a regular basis if we were living the way we're supposed to.

KB: Right. Right.

MS: If we're outside, we take a deep breath, and we go, "Wow! It feels great to be outside." Well, even your common oak tree will emit constituents of essential oils.

KB: Yes. And you know you hit on a great point. I think that part of the neat thing about essential oil therapy is that it moves a much deeper – of course, there are physiologic medical reasons, so that we can prescribe them, but there's an emotional. I mean, there's a dramatic improvement in the emotional level in terms of stress anxiety response, mental changes, and cognitive changes.

It affects an animal down to the cellular level, which, of course, affects neurochemistry and biochemistry, which means you have a happier patient. Not just a physically healthier patient, but a more balanced and grounded patient by using essential oils. Are you branching out or are you using that for like behavior modification?

MS: Oh, definitely. I have a case that taught me this the most. They can actually watch a YouTube video on the www.oilyvet.com website. It was Emmett, a bird that had horrendous papilloma. He was actually breathing so loudly. He would wake up his owner from rooms away in the middle of the night. Again, we ran euthanasia with him, but since papilloma is like a wart, that was when my brain thing came in. Little light bulbs came in and said, "I got rid of my husband's warts, why couldn't I get rid of this bird's wart?"

KB: Sure.

MS: We started treating him with – what I would say – kind of scary thing to do on a bird, especially birds. His papilloma has improved so much. It was just incredible. I actually wanted a picture of him for a presentation that I was doing. We used a different blend on him to get another photo of op. *[Laughs]* What you see on the YouTube video, there's a link to his whole story. He had actually witnessed his owner die – a previous owner die – and they laid at the bottom of his cage before anybody found him.

KB: Oh geez.

MS: I had never addressed his emotional concerns at all. I was all very tunnel-vision on papilloma, papilloma – you know, treat the physical. We sprayed him with this other blend purely only for a photo op at first. His emotions changed. I mean you can actually see it on the video. Of course, we were using our video, because we wanted to capture photos, too. He hadn't been out on his cage in over two years. He came out of his cage for the first time. You could see him perk up with the other oils and I went “Whoa...”

KB: Oh, sure.

MS: We have been missing this emotional connection in everything that we're doing.

KB: Yeah.

MS: So when we do a cancer case or something imminent... We know that emotions are still important, and we have been neglecting those so often in the pet. *[Laughs]*

KB: That we have. Absolutely, we don't think about addressing spiritual or energetically. Many veterinarians don't assume that those energetics should and need to be treated. And essential oils reach down to that level, which is more of the exciting part for me.

MS: It's really amazing, because it's so... That's what we want. We want holistic care, and they are so holistic.

KB: Yeah, absolutely.

MS: They can raise their energies. They spiritually, emotionally, and physically affect them. For me, I think that was why I was so passionate about them in the beginning, because it connected all the dots.

KB: Yep, absolutely. I tell you, it's so fun to watch your educational process, because you were beginning to change people's perspectives.

Sadly, I have wondered – I am not by nature cynical – how much of the negative rep essential oils in the last 10 years have really acquired. Is it coming from pharmaceutical companies that are not interested in having just how beneficial and broad-reaching the effects of essential oils could be? Could some of these negative comments and information be coming from people who are not necessarily interested in having people know just how cheaply and successfully they could effectively treat mind, body, and soul in their pets?

And I will tell you that I just admire your work so much, because you're out there helping people get over their fears in a logically sound way to be able to more effectively provide a totally natural and very effective form of healing for their animals. I just really appreciate what you're doing, Dr. Shelton. It's wonderful.

MS: Thank you. Well, it's certainly a passion for me. *[Laughs]*

KB: That's wonderful. So Dr. Shelton's website again, is www.oilyvet.com, and we'll encourage all of our viewers to visit your website. Of course, I anticipate you coming back with more stories and information about using essential oils for pets in the future. Thank you, Dr. Shelton for joining me.

MS: Thank you.

[END]