



St David's Equine Practice

NEWSLETTER

Vol. 5 Issue 1

FEBRUARY 2009

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JESTER SAUNDERS X-RAY SUITE

One of our former much loved clients Miss Saunders kindly bequeathed a sum of money to the practice. As her pony Jester suffered with laminitis the money helped us buy a new gantry mounted high power x-ray machine and high definition floor tube which will enable us to take excellent quality foot x-rays. We are offering a 15% discount to owners of laminitic horses and ponies when they have foot x-rays taken at the practice with our new equipment. Regular foot x-rays are very important for laminitics as they help us to monitor the progression of the disease and also to formulate a plan for treatment. We will have more about our upgraded x-ray suite in the next issue of the newsletter.

FACT SHEETS

Do you want clearer information about common equine diseases? We are adding fact sheets to our website on subjects which we are commonly asked about and they make interesting reading. We currently have sheets available on strangles, equine herpes virus (EHV) and mud fever. Links to the sheets can be found on the home page of our website www.stdavids-equine.co.uk, along with links to our newsletters. We will add more fact sheets in the future so it keep checking the website!

PASSPORT CHECKS

It has been a legal requirement for a number of years now for all horses, ponies and donkeys to have an equine passport. Your horse's passport is not valid unless you have signed Section IX stating whether or not your horse is intended for slaughter for human consumption or not. Before we can administer, dispense or prescribe drugs for your horse, we need to check its passport. If your horse is intended for human consumption there are a number of commonly used drugs which cannot be given. If your horse is not intended for human consumption then we can give any of the drugs that we are allowed to use in horses as usual. If your horse's passport is not available then we will provide you with a form stating which medication we have used and this will have to be recorded in the passport if your horse is intended for human consumption.

Please try to ensure that you have your horse's passport available whenever we are due to visit. You will also need to bring the passport to the practice to collect any drugs for your horse so that a member of staff can check that Section IX has been completed. If you still do not have a passport for your horse or pony, we can provide you with an application form or you can contact one of the horse passport agencies. All applications need to be completed by a vet. For more information please visit www.defra.gov.uk

E&L (Entertainment & Leisure) Insurance News

We are experiencing difficulties and long delays in payment of insurance claims for horses insured with E&L insurance company. Because of this we regret that we are unable to wait for payment from E&L to settle outstanding accounts.

We continue to give clients every help we can in completing their claim forms and providing any information required by the insurance company. However, we will require payment from our clients within our standard payment terms (which are 30 days from receipt of invoice).

Any contract with an insurance company is between the client and that insurance company. The contract is to reimburse the client for any legitimate claim (i.e. vets fees) after the client has paid the vet.

If you would like further information or advice on this subject, please contact Claire Hawkins on 01392 876622 ext. 2.



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THE DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT OF EQUINE BACK PAIN—PART I

This article explores the subject of equine back pain from the physiotherapist's viewpoint. Part 2 will be published in the April 2009 issue of the newsletter and will concentrate on the veterinary aspects of equine back pain.

THE DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT OF EQUINE BACK PAIN—PHYSIOTHERAPY ASPECTS

St David's Equine is now able to offer a multidisciplinary approach to the diagnosis and treatment of horses with back pain. Cases can be jointly assessed by a Veterinary Surgeon (Tony Kaye) and Chartered Veterinary Physiotherapist (Clare McDonald, 07785566953). Physiotherapy treatment can be undertaken at St David's with follow up as necessary either at the practice or client's home. In this article we will give a brief overview of the diagnosis and treatment available for horses with back pain. If you require more information please do not hesitate to contact Tony or Clare directly. We run back clinics every few weeks at the practice with free back checks (normal charges apply for any necessary treatment). Please call Claire Hawkins in the equine office to register.

WHAT IS VETERINARY PHYSIOTHERAPY?

Before becoming a Veterinary Physiotherapist, training consists of completing a three or four year full time BSc degree in human physiotherapy and undertaking two years post graduate work within human practice. The Chartered physiotherapist can then train through a scheme run by The Association of Chartered Physiotherapists in Animal Therapy (A.C.P.A.T.) or complete a Post Graduate Diploma or MSc in Veterinary Physiotherapy run by the Royal Veterinary College in London (careers info available at www.acpat.org).

A number of different techniques and approaches are adopted in the treatment of equine back pain. These differences in approach are mainly influenced by the physiotherapist's training and background in human manual therapy as well as perceived clinical results. The aims of all treatments are to optimise healing, prevent secondary complications and restore the animal to as full a function as his injury will allow.

Commonly used treatment techniques are soft tissue

manipulation (also referred to as soft tissue mobilisation and reflex inhibition), myofascial trigger point release, electrotherapy (including laser, ultrasound, TENS, H-Wave), massage, passive stretches, mobilisations and manipulation. These treatments may be carried out in combination or in isolation and are usually



Manipulation of the dorsal spinous processes

followed up with advice regarding rest where necessary, progressive controlled exercise and a programme of rehabilitation.

If your horse has had an accident, fallen, been cast or pulled back badly he may suffer soft tissue damage which leads to abnormalities in the way he moves with a resultant change in his way of going and poor performance. Common symptoms include a marked rein preference, difficulty initiating and maintaining canter, head tilting, inability to maintain a correct outline and behavioural changes such as difficulty being tacked up.

Physiotherapy can also be useful in the treatment and management of orthopaedic conditions of the spine such as sacroiliac (pelvis) disease / injury and overriding dorsal spinous processes ('kissing spines').

In order for physiotherapy treatment and rehabilitation to have a successful outcome the veterinary surgeon, physiotherapist and owner should be working together to achieve the same ultimate goal. In many cases it is essential to call in the service of other professionals such as farriers, nutritionists, trainers and saddlers in order to achieve the best outcome possible through a holistic approach.

THE PHYSIOTHERAPIST'S ASSESSMENT

Diagnosis of diseases of the spine can be difficult because the clinical signs can be subtle. Back pain, spinal disorders and sacroiliac joint injuries may simply cause chronic poor performance in horses rather than obvious back pain. It is often the case that a diagnosis of back pain is made after elimination of differential diagnoses rather than on specific clinical signs (Jeffcott 1999).

Because signs can be subtle, the examination process will involve the taking of a detailed history from the horse's owner. Without careful and systematic questioning of those closely associated with the animal it is easy to overlook vital clues as to the cause, history and



Laser treatment

evolution of the presenting complaint. The physiotherapist will then go on to conduct an examination at rest and movement (in hand, on the lunge and ridden if necessary). A thorough examination by palpation is then undertaken before identifying problems and formulating a treatment plan. The physiotherapist's ability to carefully palpate and interpret what is felt is of paramount importance in the assessment and treatment of equine patients. The level of palpatory skill can make all the difference in achieving a successful outcome through missing or misinterpreting a subtle problem. Palpation and the interpretation of findings is not a skill that can be easily taught and is where physiotherapy becomes both an art and a science. It is through the veterinary physiotherapist's experience in treating people, where verbal feedback and the patient's interpretation of pain are available that this skill is honed.

CLINICAL SIGNS

A large number of often overlapping clinical signs has been documented for *spinal ligament*, *muscular* and *verte-*

bral back pain. Pain from *spinal ligaments* can present with a bilateral or unilateral hind limb lameness associated with a decreased hind limb stride length as well as an increased head carriage and decreased ability to canter and jump.

Back problems of a *muscular* origin may present with bilateral or unilateral muscle wastage, local swelling and pain on palpation or increased muscle tone of spinal muscles. Other signs may be rigidity of the spine, decreased stride length, hind limb lameness and poor performance (Valberg 1999). While early literature has erroneously concluded that muscle wastage is always secondary to skeletal disease, it has since been found that a problem in the large spinal muscles (*longissimus*) can limit performance without lameness (Marks 1999).

Pain from *vertebral* causes such as overriding dorsal spinous processes ('kissing spines') and fractured withers are documented as loss of performance, difficulty with abrupt changes of direction, resentment of repeated flexion and extension and if in work, sensitivity of the *longissimus* muscles. Other clinical signs include persistent bucking during riding, poor hind limb action and poor jumping performance.

SECONDARY CAUSES OF BACK PAIN

It is important before going on to assess back pain to consider that anything that causes constrained head and neck movement can aggravate and cause back pain, including dental and biting problems and pain in the jaw joint.

Coexisting lameness is often evident in horses with back pain. The most common is bilateral arthritis of the distal tarsal (hock) joints. There is a relationship between back pain and lameness in that they can exacerbate one another although they can of course exist separately. Forelimb lameness can cause a problem as the horse attempts to shift more weight to the hind limbs. This shift causes elevation of the head and neck leading to back pain (Marks 1999). One study reports an 85% incidence of limb lameness in horses with back problems (Stekel et al 1991).

It is important that these conditions have first been diagnosed by your vet as it is often the case that horses receive unnecessary and expensive treatment for an ongoing back problem which is in fact only a secondary symptom. For optimum results the underlying problem and the secondary compensation should be addressed at the same time and an appropriate treatment plan formulated by vet and physiotherapist.

Clare McDonald

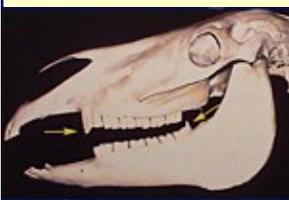
DENTAL SERVICES

At St David's we are committed to providing a high quality and complete dental service. All of our equine vets have undergone post-graduate BEVA training in equine dentistry to ensure that all the vets achieve the same high standard of dental work. All the vets carry the latest motorised dental equipment along with a large range of manual rasps and tools. We can provide effective sedation and pain relief including dental nerve blocks.



Rasping with a manual rasp

Regular routine teeth rasping is important to ensure that food your horse eats is efficiently converted into energy. It can also help maximise athletic performance as a horse that has a comfortable mouth will work better and more willingly.



Routine rasping removes hooks (shown by the yellow arrows in the picture, left) and sharp enamel edges that can make it uncomfortable for your horse

to eat or be ridden. Routine dental examinations also allow us to identify future problems such as the development of diastemas (gaps between the teeth) and incisor problems enabling us to treat these issues as they develop and before they affect the horse's wellbeing.

More complex dental treatment is usually performed at the practice. Extractions are usually done under standing sedation in our stocks but occasionally we perform extractions under general anaesthetic. We can now provide dental endoscopy under standing sedation. This allows us to have a close look at all surfaces of the teeth and will be valuable when treating fractured teeth, diastemas and cavities. We can take detailed x-rays of the teeth, their roots, the sinuses and the jaws using our new high powered x-ray machine. Dental Scintigraphy is another service we can offer which as a diagnostic tool is unsurpassed for investigating and diagnosing sinus and tooth root problems.



Dental work using motorised equipment

With our full surgical and hospitalisation facilities we are able to treat dental problems that require surgery such as sinus disease.

To discuss dental treatment for your horse or to find out about dental treatment as part of a health plan, please contact the equine team on 01392 876622 ext 2.



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