



ST DAVID'S EQUINE  
VETERINARY SURGEONS

# ST DAVID'S EQUINE PRACTICE

# NEWSLETTER

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## MOBILE PHONES

Please, please, please could you let us know if you change your mobile number! We may need to contact you to



let you know that a vet is running late or with some labora-

tory results and we currently have a lot of wrong numbers on our system. Please notify us of any changes to your details by phoning 01392 876622 option 2. This will enable us to offer you the best possible service and avoid you being inconvenienced unnecessarily if a vet has been called away on an emergency and is running late.

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## E&L INSURANCE NEWS

### Important News about Insurance Claims for Horses Insured with E&L (Entertainment & Leisure)

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, from December 2007, we will no longer be able to wait for payment from E&L to settle outstanding accounts.

We will 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 contact 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.

## STRANGLES UPDATE

We saw a large number of strangles cases in 2006 which should serve to remind all horse owners that the disease is ever present in the South West. We reported on the Strangles Appeal run jointly by the British Horse Society and the Animal Health Trust a couple of newsletters ago. The appeal is now over a third of the way towards raising its target of £250000. The money is destined for research into the disease including developing a blood test which could, in the future, be used to detect carriers before they come on to a new yard. A very useful Voluntary Code of Conduct has also been published and is available to read and download at [www.strangles.org](http://www.strangles.org). The Code gives extremely sensible and useful guidance on what to do if you suspect a strangles outbreak at your yard and how to act if the infection is confirmed. Currently there is a lot of stigma attached to strangles and many owners try to hide the fact that their horses are suffering with the disease. The code is voluntary as strangles is not a notifiable disease but it would benefit everyone in the equine community if a more responsible attitude was taken towards this devastating disease.

### NEVER MISS AN ISSUE OF THE NEWSLETTER!

Currently our equine newsletter only goes out to those clients who have had work done in the month preceding the newsletter issue. Obviously most clients don't have us out every month so if you enjoy reading this newsletter and would prefer to receive it in PDF format via e-mail, please send an e-mail to [alison@stdavids-vets.co.uk](mailto:alison@stdavids-vets.co.uk) putting **newsletter** as the subject.

# THE DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT OF EQUINE BACK PAIN—PART 1

This article explores the subject of equine back pain from the physiotherapist's viewpoint. Part 2 will be published in the March 2008 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 horse 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 horse with back pain. If you require more information please do not hesitate to contact Tony or Clare directly. We will be offering free clinics in the New Year for back and dental 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](http://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 mobilisa-

tion and reflex inhibition), myofascial trigger point release, electrotherapy (including laser, ultrasound, TENS, H-Wave), massage, passive stretches, mobilisations and manipulation. These treatments may be



*Manipulation of the dorsal spinous processes*

carried out in combination or in isolation and are usually 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 sacro-iliac (pelvis) disease / injury and over-riding 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 evolution of the presenting complaint.



*Laser treatment*

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 science. It is through the veterinary physiotherapists 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 *vertebral* 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 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, central pain on palpation, 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*

# EQUINE PASSPORTS EXPLAINED

It has been a legal requirement since 2004 for all equids (horses, ponies, donkeys, mules and hinnies) to have a valid equine passport. If you still don't have one for any of your animals you are now in the minority and could face some hefty fines. However, even if your animals do hold valid passports, are you aware of all the regulations that go with them with regards to transportation, selling, competing and veterinary treatment? Here is an overview of some of the rules regarding passports.

Passports were introduced as a measure to prevent horses entering the human food chain that had been treated at some point during their lives with medicines that must not be administered to food producing animals. We have a much larger range of drugs licensed in this country for use in horses than we do for use in traditional food animals such as cattle and sheep. Without the passport system, we risk having up to 75% of the veterinary medicines we currently use for horses being banned. This would include drugs such as bute. A very limited number of horses enter the human food chain in this country but a much larger number are slaughtered here for export to mainland Europe for human consumption. The passports are also intended to be used to set up a database of horses throughout England to help trace missing or stolen horses.

You must obtain a passport for a foal on or before the 31<sup>st</sup> December of the year of its birth, or by 6 months after its birth – whichever is the later. If the dam and sire of the foal are known, you should apply to the relevant breed society for a passport. If the dam and sire are unknown then you may apply to a general passport issuing organisation such as the Horse Passport Agency. The identification diagram for the passport application must be filled in by a vet or someone recognised by the passport issuing organisation. If you have a donkey or mule it can sometimes be difficult for us to find the minimum 5 distinguishing features in which case the animal must be microchipped.

There are a number of sections in each passport but the section which relates to horses entering the human food chain and is of the most interest to us as vets is section IX. Section IX contains a declaration stating whether the horse is intended for human consumption or not. It also contains the parts we need to fill in as vets when your horse receives certain drugs. Passports issued before the new regulations came in (any passport issued before 1<sup>st</sup> July 2004) must be returned to the issuing organisation to have section IX inserted. Owners may choose to sign section IX at any time or may choose not to sign it. However, you must sign it declaring that the horse is not intended for human consumption before we administer certain veterinary medicines. It must also be signed before a horse is put down or sent for slaughter. If you sign the declaration stating that the horse is not intended for human consumption this can never be changed by a subsequent owner or yourself. If the declaration states that a horse is intended for human consumption, you can then change it to not intended for human consumption. If a horse is imported and the passport does not contain section IX, you must either apply for a new passport for the animal or have the section IX pages inserted within 30 days of the horse arriving in England. Section IX must then state that the horse is NOT intended for human consumption (unless the horse

is re-exported within 30 days). If your horse is to be sent outside the UK for any reason you must have section IX countersigned by the relevant passport issuing organisation or the Secretary of State.

Lost or damaged passports must be replaced within 30 days – these will usually come back from the passport issuing organisation with section IX declaring that the horse concerned is not intended for human consumption unless the old passport states otherwise and can be read.

Passports must be available to vets for a number of reasons. Firstly to satisfy them that they are treating the correct animal, secondly to fill in the vaccination record if the horse is being vaccinated, thirdly to fill in section VII if any laboratory tests for transmissible diseases are carried out and finally if any veterinary medicines are administered. If the passport states that a horse is intended for human consumption or if the declaration in section IX has not been completed, the vet needs to fill in Part IIIB of section IX if the drug administered contains substances not included in Annexes I, II, III or IV. If the drug is listed in Annex IV the vet must indicate in the passport that the horse can no longer go for human consumption. Confused? Vets know which drugs are listed in each annex! Basically, if you want your horse to be treated with quite a few of the drugs we commonly use for pain relief or for anaesthesia, it cannot go for human consumption. If no passport (or the wrong one) is produced for the vet to look at, you should receive a written record of treatment and notification that these must be recorded in the passport. An explanation of the Annexes and which drugs should be recorded can be found at [www.beva.org.uk/node/84](http://www.beva.org.uk/node/84).

Since the 28<sup>th</sup> February 2005 it has been illegal to compete, breed, transport, export or sell a horse without a passport. When you buy a horse you must have the ownership details in the passport changed within 30 days. If you keep a horse on permanent loan, it is not yours but the owner's responsibility to obtain a passport. However, without a passport you cannot compete or transport the horse. Passports must accompany horses and ponies whenever they travel.

Trading Standards can demand to see passports at any time. They have been known to stop lorries transporting horses to check the passports and they can also turn up at competitions. They also have the right to enter premises where horses are kept to check passports. Non-compliance with these regulations can incur fines of £5000 maximum for cases involving 1 – 10 animals and £1000 maximum per animal for cases involving more than 10 animals. Second offences can result in up to 1 month's imprisonment!

Finally if your horse dies, is put down or goes to slaughter, you must return the passport to the issuing organisation within 30 days.

More information can be found at [www.defra.gov.uk](http://www.defra.gov.uk) in the rural affairs section. A Business Guidance Leaflet on horse passports (England) regulations 2004 at [www.tradingstandards.gov.uk](http://www.tradingstandards.gov.uk). The Horse Passport Agency's website [www.horsepassportagency.co.uk](http://www.horsepassportagency.co.uk) is also full of useful information.