

Newsletter

Physitis **Equine Cushings Disease (ECD) and sinusitis** **Angular limb deformity**

In common with most of the world we have been trying hard not to contract or spread COVID 19 coronavirus. This has definitely had an impact on our practice, however, we have continued to be able to operate and help our clients where needed. Tias' regular runs to the Gold Coast and elsewhere and the local work and surgery at Lona have been minimally impacted so far. We apologise for the slightly inconvenient changes we have had to make to the way we do business but feel this is a small sacrifice to make to ensure we can continue to serve our clients and their horses.

Again we have had a great range of interesting cases and it is always hard to know which to choose to present in this newsletter. I will try to select a few cases which might be useful to make you aware of conditions in your horses which might need attention.

The first case was of a Quarter Horse colt, about 5 months old and unweaned. We were asked to examine him because of swellings in the fetlock region. He was a lovely quiet colt and easy to examine. He was very well grown for his age and in excellent body condition. The mare was obviously a good milk producer and he was getting plenty of good quality feed on top of the milk. This history may give you a clue as to the diagnosis.

Further clues were that all 4 limbs were involved. Generally when it's an injury only one limb is affected; it would be rare for the same injury to happen to multiple limbs at the same time.



The arrows in the photos point to the swellings which actually were just above the fetlock joints.

This condition is called physitis (sometimes an older term still used is epiphysitis). A combination of genetics

for early and rapid growth, good to excessive nutrition, sometimes imbalances of nutrients in the feed and possibly other factors as well can conspire to create inflammation of the region where the long bones grow from, the growth plates. At different ages different growth plates tend to be involved, for example in yearlings we more commonly see it above in the growth plates above the knees and sometimes hocks.



This is another closer up view of the hind limb of this foal. The physitis in this foal is at the level of the distal cannon which is more common in weanlings. In most cases the condition is not excessively painful and lameness is not a feature, but it

can be. The trick to managing these is to get the correct diagnosis, correct any mineral or nutrient deficiencies or imbalances in the diet, and most importantly slow the growth rate down by reducing the amount of digestible energy in the diet. In some cases this may mean early weaning of the foal, in other cases just reducing the amount of feed supplementation is all it takes. If associated with excessive pain sometimes anti-inflammatory medications and confinement are also needed.

Equine Cushing's disease (ECD) and dental problems are both common in older horses and ponies. Last month we saw a pony with chronic discharge from the nostrils, in poor body condition and with teeth problems diagnosed by another practice. When presented by multiple problems we often need to work through them in some sort of logical step by step manner. This was a good case to illustrate this. Cushing's disease is very common in older equines. It usually is due to a benign growth at the base of the brain which causes the body to produce excessive amounts of cortisone. This causes a myriad of problems and clinical signs including failure to shed the hair coat normally, increased susceptibility to laminitis, changes to the way the kidneys work leading to excessive drinking and urination, and also importantly increased susceptibility to infection and reduced healing of wounds and other issues.

This case was a much loved pony who had been leased out for a time. When we examined him, the most urgent problems were the weight loss and chronic nasal discharge. X-rays of the teeth

did reveal moderate age related problems but we felt it more likely the nasal discharge was due to chronic sinusitis secondary to ECD. In the x-ray



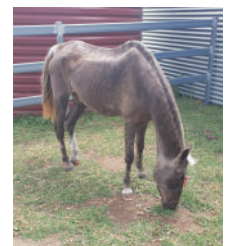
you can see gapping has developed between some of his molar teeth. A simple blood test revealed his ACTH levels (which is now the

most commonly measured parameter to diagnose ECD) were massively increased above normal. We decided to try to address the problems with his sinus infection and his ECD first. This involved trephining (drilling) holes into his sinuses and lavaging (flushing) them, antibiotics and importantly starting him on pergolide which is a drug which reduces the effects of Cushing's disease.



To the left you can see us scoping the pony after creating the trephine holes into both the left and right sinuses. After

this daily lavages were used to flush out the majority of the built up pus, and this combined with antibiotics, and reducing his cortisone levels has made a great deal of difference. The photo on the right is him



immediately after this surgery (with 2 little plugs in the holes into his sinuses), and the photo be-



low is one month later. It is a good example of not getting too focused on one issue (the teeth) and

looking at the whole horse before commencing treatments. The pony was originally presented for dental treatment and extractions, however, if we had not addressed the other problems this would have likely not have had a good outcome.

Thanks again for all your support this month from the WEV team.



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Our goal is to provide excellence in clinical service to all our equine patients.

A professional, compassionate and caring approach with good communication, and up to date services.

The last case is a paint colt which was presented to us with a sudden onset of limb deviation and mild lameness. In young horses we commonly see limb deviations to the outside as in this case, and these are usually not lame, and originate from a growth problem in the growth plate. These do not come on suddenly and may improve spontaneously with time, confinement and trimming or sometimes surgery is necessary. This case was different. At first glance it looks like a regular valgus deformity similar to what we often see in young horses as described above. If you carefully examine the photo the deviation seems to come from the centre of the knee.



There was also moderate lameness which motivated us to take some x-rays. As you can see in the x-rays there is a complex intra-articular fracture of the small bones within the knee joint itself. These injuries are due to trauma and are unfortunately very difficult to fix. The only surgical option for this injury would be an arthrodesis of the carpal joints, that is using plates and screws completely fuse the carpus resulting in a knee that cannot bend at all. Although horses can survive this surgery and have reasonable lives, there is no chance for any athletic pursuits.



In the x-rays you can see the fractures clearly (arrows) and in the x-ray above you can appreciate the collapse on the outside part of the joint.

