

News Release
COLLEGE OF VETERINARY MEDICINE
Michigan State University

June 9, 2008

NEW CLINIC FOR HORSES WITH BACK PAIN OPENS AT MSU

"Oh, my aching back!" It's a complaint heard worldwide and one of the most common reasons people go to the doctor or miss work. So, it's not hard to imagine what a horse with back pain might feel like. Unfortunately, very few veterinarians are equipped to comprehensively diagnose and treat back pain in horses.

In mid-June, Michigan State University's College of Veterinary Medicine will officially open the McPhail Equine Back Pain Clinic to meet this need. The clinic has a unique combination of professional expertise and state-of-the-art technology that holds great promise for horses with back pain.

According to the clinic's director, Dr. Rob van Wessum, at least ten to fifteen percent of equine lameness problems can be traced to problems in the back. "If we did more research, I wouldn't be surprised to find that the percentage is actually higher," he says. "People will often try to treat the lameness as a problem in the leg, when the problem is really in the back."

Other performance issues, such as bucking, rearing, stiffness, and a general resistance to work can also be signs of a back problem, even if there are no overt signs of lameness, he adds.

In the last three years, Van Wessum has worked with about 500 equine back pain cases at the MSU Veterinary Teaching Hospital (VTH) and reports that nearly all are now performing at their original level or higher. By opening a clinic at the VTH specifically devoted to this area, he hopes to bring this success to a wider audience.

Van Wessum himself is part of the formula for success. In addition to his 17 years of clinical expertise as a sport horse lameness clinician, he has experience as an internationally known rider, trainer, and judge. Combine that with the advanced technology and research available at MSU, and you get dramatic results.

Van Wessum uses several types of imaging to help pinpoint problems and treat them more accurately - fluoroscopy, Doppler ultrasound, bone scans, and (soon) MRI. Treatment is followed with a tailor-made rehabilitation program that is designed to increase the horse's range of motion and speed gradually.

Client education is an essential part of the program.

"We show clients anatomical models and videos of how horses move and give thorough explanations during the clinical exam. If they understand why we are prescribing certain rehabilitation techniques they can, and do, become really committed partners in the rehabilitation process."

He also will work with the client's local veterinarian during the horse's rehabilitation and will provide the vet with a video of the exam and all the information learned during the horse's visit.

People are already bringing their horses from around the country to meet with van Wessum, and he makes it as easy for them as possible. "We can help arrange transportation with a certified transporter and arrange hotel accommodations," he says. "We do all the diagnosis and treatment in a reasonable amount of time, two or three days, so that clients don't find it too hard to stay here with their horses."

To schedule an appointment at the McPhail Equine Back Pain Clinic, contact the MSU Large Animal Hospital at (517) 353-9710.

#

Judith L. Lessard
Editorial Assistant
Publications and Media Relations
College of Veterinary Medicine
Michigan State University
F-130 Veterinary Medical Center
East Lansing, MI 48824

Telephone: 517-355-0001
CVM website: <http://cvm.msu.edu>