

Foot abscesses are a common cause of lameness in the horse. The horse is usually fine one minute and almost non-weight-bearing lame the next. It can happen to any horse and this week it happened to Slew, our blood donor at SLREH.

He had the same common presentation that is often seen - acute onset severe lameness - and while it is more common to see it in the front legs, in Slew's case it was his right hind leg that was affected.



The interns were tasked with investigating the cause of his lameness. Although common conditions are seen the most, it is always best to work up a case with a logical approach.

It was clear when just walking Slew that he was very lame, so there was no need to evaluate his gait more thoroughly, such as during a full lameness examination, where he would be trotted and lunged. Hoof testers are used to subjectively assess areas of tenderness in the foot, when applying pressure to different areas. Although this can be a useful test, it is not an accurate tool for localising areas of pain.

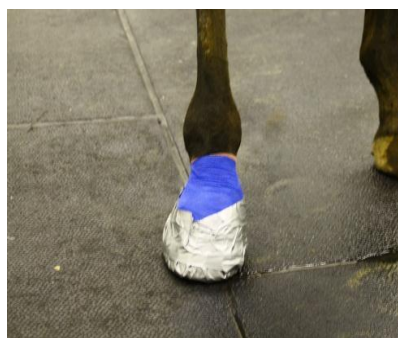
To confirm that Slew's source of pain was in the foot, an abaxial sesamoid nerve block was performed. This nerve block desensitises most structures below the fetlock. Whereas before the nerve block he was just touching his toe on the ground; afterwards he would bear weight on it. This positive response confirmed that the lameness was in the foot and warranted further investigation.

At this point, further diagnostics could be performed, such as x-rays and ultrasonography and although these were considered, in this case a foot abscess was highly suspected.

Dr. Andrew Jones tasked himself with getting to the bottom of the problem. He took a hoof knife and first cleaned up the sole of the foot before investigating any suspicious looking areas. In these areas, that might appear black, the sole was pared down to investigate if there was a tract to follow, potentially to an abscess.

Sure enough, while following one of these tracts an area started to open up where fluid was draining, especially when squeezed!

Unfortunately Slew has very hard soles, which made paring down the sole to open up the abscess to allow complete drainage difficult. As such a poultice was



applied to help draw out any pus and the following day his foot was soaked to help soften it up before opening up the affected area. It turned out that he also had an area of his sole around the abscess that was under-run, which was also removed.

With the abscess drained Slew is now comfortable again and his lameness has resolved.

It is important if you find your horse lame, that it is seen as early as possible by a veterinarian so that the underlying cause can be determined and appropriate action is taken to minimise any discomfort.

For further information about foot abscesses, lameness examinations or any other topics mentioned, do not hesitate to contact us at:

(760) 726-4566