

Maintaining the Flow

EQUINE CHIROPRACTIC AND ACUPUNCTURE SEMINAR WITH DEB SCHULTZ

BY ALLISON SCHULTZ (no relation)

On the brisk Sunday afternoon of January 28, 2007, Deb Schultz, DVM, talked to a small, but hearty, group of folks in the indoor area of Rabbit Mountain Equestrian Center about the value of chiropractic care and acupuncture for our equine partners. Dr. Schultz has been practicing since 1998, and was moved to focus her work on chiropractic when she witnessed its transformative power on a visibly cranky, nasty horse during a demonstration while in vet school. Once the cantankerous horse got an adjustment, his eyes immediately softened, he lowered his head and let out a huge sigh. At the time, she wondered just how many horses that we label "irritable and bad tempered" may actually be in pain. Her talk gave us the tools to reflect upon the question of the hour: "Is my horse well adjusted?"

"Chiropractics is all about joints and making sure they are moving properly," she began. "When the horse's joints are stressed or over extended, they can lock up; and when a joint in the horse's body is not moving correctly, there becomes restricted movement, stiffness and pain." This instance of pain in a joint causes surrounding muscles and ligaments to compensate, which can create a ripple effect to other areas of the horse's body and predispose them to further injury as the body becomes out of balance. If joints aren't moving correctly, an adjustment is necessary to keep them fluid and flowing.

Horses' joints can get locked up in many ways. Horses can do it to themselves while they are out in the pasture by bucking, kicking, tossing their head around, catching a slippery spot of ice, stumbling or falling. Sometimes, even leading a horse into a stall can cause a joint to lock up if the horse hits his ribs or hip on the stall door. Things that we do with and to our horses can also cause the need for an adjustment. Quick stops, quick turns, landing a jump incorrectly, and harsh training methods are situations that stress joints and can cause them to lock up.

How do you know if your horse needs an adjustment? If a normal behavior changes and your horse doesn't work like he used to, something might be causing him pain. Signs that your horse might need chiropractic include: a sore back, mild lameness, "girthiness" when saddled, diffi-



EQUINE CHIRO AND ACUPUNCTURE WORK

Above: Deb does chiro on Seneca with owner Mary Mattison watching on. Next page: Top: Deb feels Seneca's movement. Bottom: Deb works on lower back stretches with Seneca. Photos by Allison Schultz.

culty getting collection or setting head, lack of bending in either direction, refusing jumps, becoming resistant to training, difficulty picking up leads, swapping leads, tail swishing. After an adjustment, many previously painful horses completely change their attitude and become more willing and a pleasure to ride. Naturally, it follows that if your horse is comfortable, he'll perform much better.

Dr. Schultz uses acupuncture as a follow up treatment to a chiropractic treatment if the exam shows muscular-skeletal problems. Acupuncture can help an adjustment last longer by relaxing the muscles surrounding the joints, increasing circulation to the area, and releasing beta-endorphins for natural pain relief.

Because of the interconnectedness of the horse's skeletal, muscular and nervous systems, chiropractic maintenance can keep your equine companion performing and functioning at his maximum potential by removing any stuck joints and vertebra that could inhibit the flow of the nerve pathways to your horse's organs and extremities. A well adjusted horse is a well balanced horse inside and out.

Other things that can affect muscular-skeletal issues are dentistry, proper hoof care and balanced feet, saddle fit, and other medical issues such as stomach ulcers. Staying on top of your horse's overall health and fitness is the best way to prevent chiropractic issues. It's best to keep your equine athlete in tip-top shape without pushing them beyond their capabilities. A proper warm-up and cool down, as well as stretching, also keeps joints in good working condition.

During the seminar, Dr. Schultz did a live demonstration on a 12-year-old Oldenburg gelding named Seneca. She ran her hands along his back, partway down his ribs, along his sacroiliac joint, and down his neck. At several points he visibly flinched, which Deb called his pressure points. She manipulated each point with a deft push of the heel of her hand ("reputable chiropractors don't use mallets!"). When she retested the horse for sensitivity at each point he gave no sign of his earlier pain response, indicating that she had found and treated each problem successfully. Overall, everyone was amazed at how readily noticeable Seneca's expression had changed after the adjustment. The seminar offered new insights into this remarkable therapy, and perhaps garnered some new followers ready to better maintain the flow in their own horses.



NEWS NOTES

CHR's Horse of the Month: Meet Coco



Coco is a beautiful 10-year-old registered Paso Fino mare. No, No, No, she is not pregnant. Yes, Yes, Yes, she is chubby, but she has a good excuse for her fluffy waistline. Coco has hypothyroidism, and has slowly started to lose weight with the help of her new supplements. Coco is a very sensitive girl, and is patiently waiting for the perfect person to fall in love with her and take her home. She requires an experienced handler to help her overcome her shyness and insecure nature. Coco really blooms when she is handled consistently and responds well with confident leadership. Her beautiful floating movement is breathtaking to watch. If you have been thinking about a gaited horse, Coco may just be your gal. She is sound, healthy and ready to begin her new life as your very smooth trail buddy. Please visit our website at www.chr.org for more information on adoption, or call Colorado Horse Rescue at 720-494-1414.