



THE EQUINE SPORTS WELLNESS NETWORK

Equine Sports Wellness

The objectives of an effective sports wellness program are to:

- 1) Minimize the equestrian's time out of the saddle (i.e. keep the horse in consistent work).
- 2) Save the equestrian money by staying ahead of problems that would otherwise incur increased diagnostic and treatment costs.
- 3) Improve the horse's prognosis for future performance by addressing issues promptly.
- 4) Upgrade the veterinary professional's ability to successfully manage equine performance through the expeditious diagnosis and treatment of performance-limiting issues.
- 4) Build relationships among veterinarians and farriers by referring and retro-referring cases as needed to achieve the optimal outcome.

The key to successful equine sports wellness lies in our ability to proactively *seek-out* potential lameness cases with the intention of detecting problems during their "window of treatment opportunity", aka the phase when treatment will still be curative or at least highly-effective. As you know, recognizing a problem after it has already reached the advanced and/or chronic phase can make successful management more difficult and in some cases impossible.

Standard Practice of Equine Sports Medicine

Once a problem has been recognized, equestrians tend to be fairly proficient with regard to seeking professional consultation, performing the necessary diagnostics and implementing appropriate treatment.

Veterinary research in the field of equine sports medicine has primarily been focused on improving diagnostic and treatment techniques that are implemented *after* the presence of a problem has already been confirmed. The inclusion, implementation and renovation of various specialized diagnostic and treatment modalities comprise the primary objective of most high-end equine sports medicine facilities.

The Practice of Equine Sports Wellness

By definition, the principles of sports wellness occur *prior to* and *separately from* the diagnostic and treatment phases of soundness management. The primary goal of an effective wellness program is to shorten the length of time between the ONSET of lameness and its RECOGNITION, thereby satisfying the aforementioned objectives.

Most wellness programs entail the following course of events:

- 1) The equestrian summons their primary veterinary practice or farrier to aid in the potential recognition of a problem. This occurs through telemedical analysis of video footage, a service that uses a smart phone app to orchestrate seamless communication between parties.
- 2) The problem is recognized and characterized by the professional using visual markers for lameness. When necessary, the professional can instantly refer the consultation to a veterinary or farrier specialist for further insight and/or a second opinion.
- 3) The professional reviews the consultation and provides a clear summary for the client. This is most easily accomplished through the instant generation of a descriptive video commentary that might incorporate annotations and diagrams.
- 4) Depending on the results of the consultation, an appointment with the primary professional may be scheduled. The professional performs clinical examination with the intention of procuring a diagnosis and formulating a treatment strategy for the horse. In many cases, an appointment would not have been made if not for preemptive professional intervention.
- 5) In the event that further (more specialized) diagnostics and/or treatment is indicated, the primary professional may refer the case to specialty practice or a local referral sports medicine facility.

Professional Benefits Associated with Equine Sports Wellness

Increased income. The overhead associated with pre-emptive remote assessment is minimal, since this technology is readily available. Moreover, very little time investment is required to perform telemedical review.

Increased proficiency at visually assessing lameness. A professional may review up to 100 videos per week without the restrictions imposed by distance and time. A setting in which a single examiner can evaluate a large number of subjects has been suggested to be a crucial part of refining one's subjective diagnostic accuracy.¹ This may be especially helpful when teaching students to visually assess lameness in the horse.

Increasing your referral basis. The symbiotic relationship afforded through sports wellness programs increases veterinarian-farrier case involvement, which in turn enhances and facilitates regular interaction between these groups of professionals.

Improved client satisfaction. This system allows equestrians to stay ahead of the game by staying ahead of performance-limiting problems (hence the term *wellness*). In the end, each rider spends less time dealing with pathology and more time in the saddle. Accordingly, the equestrian is more successful in his/her endeavors.

Abbreviated Appointment Times. A recent survey² reported that the most popular equine telemedical service is pre-appointment evaluation, which has historically served to shorten appointment times considerably. By pre-emptively reviewing video footage, the professional team has already established the visual and mental portions of the exam prior to hands-on evaluation. This service may be especially useful in a teaching environment, where a large part of the conversation with the students can take place without the client having to wait.

Improved Data Collection. Pre- and post-appointment evaluations can occur at anytime via the equestrian's acquisition and submission of desired imagery through telemedical means. This enables professionals to regularly track changes in the horse's health or performance over time, thereby validating any positive response to treatment. More data points translate into more accurate assessment and supervision of the horse.

Less Wasted Time. An effective telemedical solution allows the equestrian to contact their professional team without having to make an on-site appointment. This allows the professional to pick and choose which cases require personal hands-on attention and which cases don't. In the end, less time is spent on the road.

REFERENCES

¹Keegan KG, Columbia MO. Objective measures of lameness evaluation, in *Proceedings*. ACVS Veterinary Symposium 2012;127-131.

²Grisel GR. Current horse owner petition for telemedical assessment of equine lameness, in *Proceedings*. 63rd American Association of Equine Practitioners Annual Convention 2017 (San Antonio): 501-505.