

Equine Rehabilitation Discussed at AAEP Convention

One of the purposes of the American Association of Equine Practitioners (AAEP) Convention in Las Vegas, Nev., was to educate veterinarians on the opportunities and use of rehabilitation techniques in equine practice.

Rehabilitation is defined as attempting to restore to a former capacity or to bring to a condition of health or useful activity. A broad clinical definition of what constitutes rehabilitation is any intervention that is applied with the specific purpose of improving athletic performance. Two conceptual frameworks for which rehabilitation is used are: addressing pain, proprioception, flexibility, endurance, and strength, in a progressive order; or to focus on the specific healing properties and rehabilitation of a tissue type (e.g., tendon or joint) or body system (e.g., cardiopulmonary).

Certification courses currently available include the Equine Rehabilitation Institute (equinerehabilitationinstitute.com) and a course associated with the University of Tennessee (vet.utk.edu/clinical/rehab/programs.php). Current professional organizations include the International Association of Veterinary Rehabilitation and Physical Therapy (IAVRPT) and the American Association of Rehabilitation Veterinarians (AARV).

A new board specialty in sports medicine that is currently under review is the American College of Veterinary Sports Medicine and Rehabilitation (ASVSMR). The next meeting of the International Association of Veterinary Rehabilitation and Physical Therapy will be held on August 4-7, 2010, in Auburn, Ala. (vetrehabsymposium.weebly.com).

Primary characteristics for referral to--or incorporation of--physical therapists into a veterinary practice include licensed personnel with extensive horse experience. The discussion did include some

comments on the use of aquatic therapies, pulsed electromagnetic therapy (PEMF), ridden exercise, and basic treatment protocols for rehabilitation of tendon injuries. The group did acknowledge the general lack of formal research in many equine rehabilitation modalities. Currently, there are research projects into rehabilitation techniques underway at Colorado State University with Dr. Melissa King and at Michigan State University with Dr. Hilary Clayton and Narelle Stubbs. A series of articles in the recent issues of the *Journal of Equine Veterinary Science* review the topics of massage, stretching, manual therapy, and therapeutic exercises.

The session closed with interested veterinary participants signing up for initiation of an equine rehabilitation list-serve.

This Table Topic article was written by Kathleen Anderson, DVM, and Kevin K. Haussler, DVM, DC, PhD.