

Veterinarian Confident in the use of Equine Acupuncture

by Jessica Shifflett

In a sport with competition so steep the difference in first place and last place is but a matter of seconds, the first-rate physical condition of racehorses is



crucial. Racehorse trainers and owners at Prairie Meadows set horse health care first on their priority lists, creating a demand for the indispensable services of excellent professionals. This sends the Prairie Meadows community to the forefront of advancements in equine health care and sets the stage for Dr. Charles McDaniel, D.V.M., of Heartland Acupuncture Service in Ankeny.

While the eyes of some horse owners and trainers widen in awe upon witnessing results of Dr. McDaniel's chiropractic and acupuncture techniques, others squint in skepticism at the mention of alternative veterinary procedures.

Recently, more and more horse owners have climbed on board with alternative veterinary practices and, as McDaniel points out from the driver's seat, "There's a lot less resistance, more acceptance to it now that there was when I first started."

According to McDaniel, the popularity of equine chiropractics and acupuncture is on the rise.

Much like human acupuncture, equine acupuncture stimulates an acupuncture point by means of a needle or a laser, or through electrical stimulation. McDaniel does not suggest acupuncture as a replacement for drugs or surgery but, instead, describes it as preventative medicine or an adjunct to surgery that is most commonly used post-surgically to hasten recovery.

It was McDaniel's personal experiences undergoing acupuncture treatments that sparked his intrigue and set a newfound interest in the discipline in motion.

"I had never heard of acupuncture when I graduated from vet school," McDaniel recalls. A veterinarian McDaniel studied under in Minnesota suggested he personally seek acupuncture treatments to ease the pain on severe shoulder soreness. "One shoulder I hadn't slept on in sixteen years—the other for seven-and-a-half to

eight years. I had been taking medication, yet still couldn't sleep on them."

After successful results from the acupuncture treatments, McDaniel thought, "...if it works on people, why wouldn't it work on horses?"

That notion sent him off and running over the course of the next 16 years as a successful equine chiropractor and acupuncturist, certified by the International Veterinary Acupuncture Society and endorsed by the American Veterinary Chiropractic program.

Generally, McDaniel treats each horse with both chiropractics and acupuncture.

A typical treatment on a racehorse can be completed in as little as 20 minutes. He begins by spending a couple of minutes with the horse, petting him, scratching him, and letting the horse smell him so it doesn't feel threatened or intimidated.

He checks the horse's teeth to determine if it needs dental work, and then performs a hands-on examination of the patient by palpating acupuncture points and monitoring each reaction.



He uses an empty needle casing as a diagnostic tool, running it over the horse in long strokes while observing the horse's reactions. He checks a total of 140 to 150 acupuncture points.

"The big challenge is trying to figure out what's wrong with the horse," says McDaniel. "After that, the treatment is a piece of cake."

Many times the treatment continues with *aquapuncture*, a practice where fluids are injected into the horse through a needle similar to a spinal needle used on people.

One type of aquapuncture treatment consists of an injection of an iodine and oil mixture that provides treatment lasting three to four weeks longer than dry needles. In addition, vitamin B12, when injected in

sensory-type points, speeds up results.

Technology advancements have resulted in an even more effective method, laser acupuncture. A soft laser is used to trigger a photochemical response instead of a thermal response, which, in turn, strikes diseased cells and initiates the healing of tissue. When an acupuncture point is stimulated, naturally occurring endorphins, steroids, serotonin, prostaglandins and other chemical mediators are released.

To conclude the treatment, McDaniel goes over the horse with a hand-held electric chiropractic activator.

"After I'm done with the initial treatment, I go back through and re-examine to see if anything else is showing up. As a friend of mine says, it's like peeling the layers of an onion. You get the one that's the worst, and then maybe something that's not bothering them quite so much will show up."

Without a doubt, McDaniel's resume is impressive. He travels the nation with his practice and, just last month, he made a third trip to the China Agriculture University in Beijing with a group of veterinary students from Iowa State University to study animal acupuncture in the country in which it originated.

"It's a never-ending process," says McDaniel. "Since acupuncture is several thousand years old, you would think we ought to know everything there is to know about it pretty quickly, but part of it is a continual learning process," he says.

McDaniel is confident animal chiropractics and acupuncture work.

"Oh, you can just see the difference in a horse," McDaniel testifies. "Most of the time you'll see the pain leave their eyes and they'll just relax."

He claims by ridding the horse of pain, the horse will perform better.

With a chuckle he tells people, "I wish I could bet on the horses I've treated. I could make more money betting on them than I do treating them."

About the Author:

Jessica Shifflett of Osceola, Iowa, will be a sophomore this fall at Iowa State University majoring in agriculture communications. This summer, Shifflett is working in the Marketing and Public Relations Department at Prairie Meadows in Altoona, Iowa. Her parents are Randy and Marla Shifflett of Osceola.

