

Preventative Health Care Series - Part One

Horse Owner and Veterinarian: Establishing and Maintaining a Working Relationship

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(first installment in an upcoming series of articles)

Veterinarians are health care providers and are devoted to helping their patients. As a horse owner, you can help your veterinarian serve your horse and yourself better, by becoming a regular client.

It is best if this relationship is established before an emergency. The veterinarian will be able to better serve you and your horse if he/she knows where the horse is located, the facilities, the health and temperament of the horse, and you, the horse owner and your situation.

Your veterinarian should be a key partner in your horse's health. Maintaining regular visits with your veterinarian will strengthen the relationship and aid in the prevention of some diseases or emergency situations. Just as in any other relationship, it requires good communication and trust. So here are a few tips on how best to work with your equine veterinarian.

Making the Call

First, it is always best to call sooner than later. The outcome is typically better when a veterinarian is able to examine your horse when an illness or injury is first noted.

When making this call be prepared to provide information. The veterinarian or receptionist/technician will want to gather information to schedule the appointment and to assure that the veterinarian is scheduled adequate time and is appropriately equipped. Typical questions may be related to the location, severity and duration of an injury or illness. It is helpful if you are able to provide pertinent vitals (temperature, heart rate, respiratory rate, degree of pain, or lameness).

Don't expect your veterinarian to diagnosis and treat over the phone; it is best to develop an appropriate treatment plan, after the horse has been examined.

Trust

Horse owners should trust that their veterinarian is looking out for the best interest of the horse. With the physical examination, appropriate treatment options (including the potential for referral), estimates, and prognosis can be given. Then the veterinarian should respect the elected treatment option and trust that the horse owner will comply, follow through on his/her directions and pay for the services. If you don't understand what your veterinarian is explaining, then you need to feel comfortable asking questions. Otherwise, the relationship is not working.

With the Internet, it is easy to obtain a great deal of information. But use caution; some of the information is good, while some information may be outdated, simply a testimonial, or not applicable to your horse or situation. Trust your veterinarian's knowledge and experience. Use the information obtained from the Internet to stimulate dialogue between you and your veterinarian.

Maintaining the Relationship

In a successful veterinarian/client relationship, both parties need to express respect, common courtesy, and understanding. The horse owner should be aware that veterinarians are busy, especially in the spring. Therefore, a horse owner should understand when a veterinarian has an unexpected emergency, is running late for an appointment, or is unable to promptly return a phone call. But in return, the veterinarian should respect the horse owner and have the courtesy to call and reschedule or give an estimated time of arrival.

Be prepared for your appointment, with your horse caught. And try to avoid the "while you're here" scenario, as this delays the veterinarian for the next appointments. If additional services are needed, try to call



Christine Wilkin, DVM, with her Hanoverian mare, Caliente GH.

before your appointment to request the additional services or schedule another visit. If you're hauling into a hospital/clinic, make sure you allow yourself plenty of time and call if you are going to be late.

The good working relationship will require the veterinarian to provide a diagnosis, a treatment plan, and keep records. And to continue this relationship the veterinarian needs the horse owner to comply and pay for the services rendered.

Communication is important in maintaining this relationship. Updated progress reports, any changes in treatment course or finances need to be relayed, by both parties.

The horse owner and veterinarian have the same goal: a healthy horse.

The horse owner knows his/her horse the best, by daily observations and care. With years of professional education and experience, the veterinarian is knowledgeable in diseases and health care. Working together as partners makes for a good team; the end result being to keep the horse healthy and/or to prevent suffering.

Emergency Etiquette

As a horse owner, you will have an emergency. So try to be prepared for the day. Have your veterinarian's phone number handy. (And possibly the phone number of another veterinarian, in case your veterinarian is currently tied up with an emergency, or temporarily unreachable, or on vacation.) Have access to a trailer, as some emergencies need to be transported to a hospital setting. Try to remain calm and be patient. Provide as much information as possible and try to answer any questions.

Conditions Regarded as Emergencies

- Colic
- Puncture Wounds or Lacerations (especially over a joint or tendon)
- Eye Injuries
- Difficulty Breathing
- Uncontrollable Bleeding
- Dystocia (difficulty in foal delivery)