Postoperative Complications After Colic Surgery in Geriatric Versus Mature Non-Geriatric Horses

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Geriatric and mature horses have similar short-term postoperative colic complications. Authors’ addresses: Large Animal Surgery, Tufts Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine. North Grafton, MA 01536 (Gazzerro); Department of Clinical Studies, New Bolton Center, University of Pennsylvania, 382 West Street Road, Kennett Square, PA 19348 (Southwood, Lindborg); e-mail: Deanna.Pie@tufts.edu. *Corresponding and presenting author. © 2013 AAEP.

1. Introduction

Many believe that geriatric horses have prolonged, complicated recoveries from colic surgery. Studies have evaluated survival rates in geriatrics undergoing colic surgery or used age in multivariable analyses when evaluating specific postoperative complications (eg, postoperative reflux [POR]); however, there have been no comprehensive studies, to the authors’ knowledge, comparing such complications or associated outcomes in geriatric (≥20 years) and mature (4–15 years) horses.

2. Materials and Methods

Medical records were evaluated for horses age ≥20 years (geriatric, n = 78) and 4 to 15 years (mature, n = 156) surviving ≥24 hours after colic surgery from 2000 to 2010. Postoperative complications included POR, diarrhea, fever, leukopenia, incisional infection, incisional dehiscence, thrombophlebitis, colic, re-laparotomy, pneumonia, and laminitis. Short-term outcomes of horses with complications were compared. Data were analyzed by means of a χ² test or an analysis of variance. The level of significance was P < 0.05.

3. Results

For most complications, proportions of geriatric and mature horses with complications and short-term outcome were similar.

A higher proportion of geriatrics had a small intestinal strangulation and small intestinal resection and anastomosis, leading to an overall higher proportion with development of POR. There was no difference, however, in the proportion of geriatric versus mature horses with a small intestinal strangulation with development of POR.

A higher proportion of geriatrics was inappetent after surgery, which remained significant for horses with small intestinal strangulations.

4. Discussion

Geriatric horses have colic surgery recoveries, in terms of short-term outcome and postoperative complications, similar to mature horses, a useful finding when discussing surgical options with owners.