Osteoarthritis of the Carpometacarpal Joint (Carpal Spavin): Treatment of 12 Cases by Arthrodesis

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Arthrodesis of the carpometacarpal joint (CMC) allowed most horses to return to their original activity and should be considered a treatment option for carpal spavin. Authors’ address: Department of Large Animal Clinical Sciences, Western College of Veterinary Medicine, 52 Campus Drive, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan S7N 5B4, Canada; e-mail: spence.barber@usask.ca. © 2009 AAEP.

1. Introduction
Carpal spavin is a debilitating lameness characterized by swelling, proliferative new bone, narrowed joint space, and subchondral lysis at the MCII/C2 articulation. There is no successful treatment, and affected horses respond poorly to traditional treatments, have shortened careers, and an unfavorable prognosis of life.

2. Materials and Methods
Some owners were willing to have an experimental surgery performed on their affected horses in hopes of producing an arthrodesis and returning the horses to normal activity. A technique consisting of insertion of a drill bit into the joint at several locations was performed in 12 clinical cases (15 limbs). Follow-up radiographs were obtained for seven cases (nine legs). A telephone survey was performed to obtain long-term, follow-up information.

3. Results
Post-operative pain was not marked. Eleven of twelve horses were markedly improved by 6 mo and capable of returning to work. Radiographically, six carpometacarpal (CMC) joints had a bony ankylosis. All horses had reduced severity of lameness. Ten horses were considered “sound,” and eight horses returned to their original activity; all owners were pleased with the results.

4. Discussion
Morbidity was low, and there were no immediate or long-term complications. Horses returned to normal activities and soundness and had a marked improvement over the prognosis reported for conservatively treated cases. Therefore, we feel that this arthrodesis technique was highly successful.

This research was funded by the Western College of Veterinary Medicine at the University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada.

Research Abstract

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