Thoracotomy in Horses: Indications, Complications, and Outcomes

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Thoracotomy should be considered for the management of recurrent or chronic infectious pleural disease. Outcome of thoracotomy may be more favorable than previously thought. Author’s addresses: William R. Pritchard Veterinary Medical Teaching Hospital, School of Veterinary Medicine, University of California at Davis, One Shields Avenue, Davis, California 95616 (Hilton); Department of Medicine and Epidemiology, School of Veterinary Medicine, University of California at Davis, One Shields Avenue, Davis, California 95616 (Aleman, Madigan); and Department of Surgical and Radiological Sciences, School of Veterinary Medicine, University of California at Davis, One Shields Avenue, Davis, California 95616 (Nieto); e-mail: hghilton@ucdavis.edu. © 2009 AAEP.

1. Introduction
Thoracotomy has been described in the horse.1–4 Therapeutically, thoracotomy has been most commonly reported in the management of pleuritis, often being employed to aid in the resolution of thoracic abscesses after the failure of thoracostomy tube drainage and medical management to resolve recurrent disease.3,5 Little information is available to the clinician regarding indications for the procedure or expected outcomes.

2. Materials and Methods
Patient records of horses that had undergone thoracotomy between the years of 1990 and 2008 were reviewed. For each case, clinical, medical, imaging, and surgical findings were recorded. Perioperative and short-term complications were recorded from medical records. Long-term outcomes were retrieved by means of telephone conversations with owners. A final diagnosis was recorded for each case based on clinical diagnosis or necropsy.

3. Results
Seventeen horses were identified for inclusion in the study. Recurrent or non-resolving pleural abscessation secondary to pleuritis was the most common indication for thoracotomy. Thoracotomy was performed under standing sedation in 15 horses. Anaerobic bacteria were frequently isolated from pleural fluid and tracheal aspirates. Each horse received antibiotic therapy, and intrapleural medication was commonly attempted before thoracotomy. Short-term complications were minimal, and several horses returned to full work after surgery.

4. Discussion
Thoracotomy should be considered for the resolution of recurrent infection of the pleural space in horses. The procedure may be performed under standing sedation with minimal short-term complications and encouraging clinical outcome.
References


