

The Equine Veterinarian's Role in Potential Cases of Animal Abuse

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Equine veterinarians may come across cases of animal abuse during the course of daily practice, or may be asked by law enforcement to assist in the investigation and prosecution of a case. The veterinarian's role in a potential case of animal abuse involves crime scene investigation, the examination of live and deceased animals, authoring a forensic veterinary statement, and the provision of expert witness testimony. Therefore, veterinarians must have a thorough understanding of their role and how to identify, collect, and preserve veterinary forensic evidence. Authors' address: American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, 520 8th Avenue, 7th Floor, New York, NY 10018; e-mails: rachel.touroo@aspca.org; nicole.eller@aspca.org. *Corresponding and presenting authors. Copyright © 2016. The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animal (ASPCA). All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Veterinary forensic medicine is an emerging and rapidly developing branch of veterinary medicine. It is essential for veterinarians to be involved in cases of animal maltreatment, given that veterinarians are and should be the leaders for setting the highest standards for animal welfare in society. Not only does society demand the investigation of crimes against animals, but crimes against animals affect more than just animals. There is a strong and established link between human violence and animal cruelty. Crimes against animals can be a warning sign of future violent acts, and individuals who witness animal cruelty can become desensitized to violence. Animal abuse may also occur in conjunction with other crimes such as domestic violence and the illegal sales of drugs and guns. Having taken an oath, veterinarians have a duty not only to protect and serve animals but humans as well. Violence is a public health matter. By addressing

animal abuse, veterinarians have the potential to save human and animal life as well as reduce suffering. Opportunities are increasingly available for veterinarians to educate themselves on these topics. Both a Graduate Certificate and Master's Degree in Veterinary Forensic Sciences are now available online through the University of Florida. In addition, more veterinary schools are beginning to offer elective courses in the area of veterinary forensic medicine and publications on the topic have become more plentiful.

Veterinarians play a critical role in animal abuse cases, encompassing an array of duties within the context of veterinary forensic sciences. Veterinary forensic science is the application of a broad spectrum of sciences, including veterinary medicine, to answer questions of interest to a court of law. The term "forensic medicine" is used to encompass all aspects of forensic work of a medical nature. In the past, this term was often used interchangeably with

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“forensic pathology.” Forensic pathology, however, refers to the branch of forensic medicine that deals with death investigations. More recently, the term “clinical forensic medicine” is applied to the branch of forensic medicine involving the living.

There is a spectrum of the levels of animal maltreatment, most laws use the term, “cruelty,” but maltreatment may also be described as “abuse” or “neglect.” Legal definitions of these terms vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction but in general the term, “abuse” refers to the willful failure to provide care and harmful behaviors that result in maltreatment regardless of the intent, motivation, or mental condition of the perpetrator.¹ Whereas “cruelty” implies more deliberate infliction of pain from which the abuser derives enjoyment or amusement², “neglect” tends to be the most commonly encountered form of maltreatment and refers to the failure to provide care or an act of omission, as opposed to cruelty, which would be an act of commission.

2. The Evolution of a Case

Veterinarians may be approached by law enforcement or a humane agent to assist with a case investigation or may come across a suspected or known case of abuse during the regular course of their day. This may take the form of a rescue that has exceeded its capacity to care. For example, in April 2009, a large-scale rescue of 211 horses was accomplished by cooperation between several groups, both national and local. The rescue started off with the goal of being a sanctuary for Bureau of Land Management (BLM) mustangs that had gone through three adoption events without finding a home. These animals, deemed “unadoptable,” faced life in a holding pen, or possibly illegally being sent to slaughter. This sanctuary meant to give these horses, and others whose owners could no longer care for them, an alternative place to go. However, things began to go wrong as the horse population climbed and funds and hay became limited.

A mid-April investigation spawned by Internet chatter, concerned and observant neighbors, diligent veterinarians, county law officials, and others uncovered the grisly truth that at least 74 head of dependent horses and burros were allowed to starve to death during the winter. Following this discovery, 211 head of horses, mules, and donkeys in varied but serious stages of neglect were rescued from the premises. Law enforcement flew over the rescue, spotting two pits filled with horse carcasses and other scattered remains. BLM officials were alerted and went to the ranch, confiscating one emaciated BLM horse and learning that another three were dead. A charge of felony animal cruelty was filed, resulting in the jailing of the owner.

Fortunately, the organizations involved had already developed extensive databases of trained volunteers who could be called upon to respond when

needed, along with a list of each volunteer’s credentials, training, and expertise. This is one of the keys to dealing with large-scale animal disasters, whether natural or man made. Veterinarians must get involved by reaching out to local and state government disaster-relief agencies and state veterinary medical associations, as well as nonprofits and large-animal technical rescue groups that are developing in many states. This case relied on over 700 volunteers as well as a team of dedicated veterinarians and veterinary students.

3. Recognizing Abuse

Veterinarians are not traditionally trained to identify features that raise the index of suspicion of animal abuse or signs consistent with or highly suggestive of abuse. In addition, veterinarians often fall into the trap of thinking that owners who care enough about their animals to provide veterinary care are unlikely to abuse their animals. This is simply not the case. The largest barrier to diagnosing abuse is the existence of emotional blocks in the minds of veterinary professionals. These can be so powerful that they prevent the diagnosis from even being considered in obvious cases. The most important step in diagnosing animal abuse is to force oneself to consider this as a differential diagnosis.

For many equine veterinarians, abuse will likely be observed or suspected on the farm as opposed to in a clinic setting with other people around. How the situation is approached depends on the relationship with the client. But do not forget to treat the animal first. Although a crime may have been (or is being) committed, do not compromise timely treatment of the animal. A conversation with the client may shed some light, such as indications that the abuser may be a spouse or significant other. Taking thorough notes, and possibly photographs, if this can be done without arousing suspicion from the client, is helpful; however, be aware of getting yourself into a situation that may become volatile or unsafe. If the circumstances do not allow for documentation at the farm, do a thorough examination with detailed medical records as normal, address the presenting complaint, and make additional notes when you leave the farm.

It is important to note that animal abuse is a legal, not medical, determination. Just because a veterinarian may believe that an act qualifies as abuse does not mean that the law recognizes it as such. Therefore, the veterinarian must be familiar with the applicable laws in order to make an informed opinion as to whether an act or omission may qualify as abuse, but ultimately this is the determination of the prosecuting attorney. When reporting potential or suspected animal abuse it is not the duty of the veterinarian to identify suspects or determine guilt or innocence. All known or suspected cases should be reported, allowing for law enforcement to investigate and for the prosecuting attorney

to determine whether charges should be brought forth. Ultimately, the judge or jury decides guilt or innocence. Therefore, if abuse is suspected, it should be reported.

Unfortunately, many veterinarians are unaware of the appropriate authorities to whom they should report and such authorities vary from state to state and even from locality to locality within a given state,³ thus inhibiting the ease with which veterinarians are expected to report known or suspected animal abuse.³ To alleviate this issue veterinarians should take a proactive response to reporting abuse and determine the appropriate authority to whom they should report prior to facing a known or suspected case of abuse.

Veterinary forensic science is essential to the prosecution of animal abuse and therefore law enforcement should involve a veterinarian in every case. The veterinarian's role in potential cases of animal abuse is multifaceted including crime scene investigation, the examination of live and deceased animals, authoring a forensic veterinary statement, and the provision of expert witness testimony. Expert witness testimony will not be addressed here as it is covered elsewhere in these proceedings by Frederickson.⁴ Unfortunately, most veterinarians have little to no training in forensic science but must at least have an understanding of their role and how to identify, collect, and preserve evidence before assisting with a potential case of animal abuse. It is also important for veterinarians to understand that they should not extend beyond their skill set but instead recognize when to utilize other professionals as needed. Most veterinary forensic cases will involve a multidisciplinary approach, including assistance from other specialists such as pathologists, forensic toxicologists, and radiologists.

4. Assisting in a Large-Scale Investigation

Animal cruelty cases, particularly on a large scale, can involve many agencies on many different levels. Without a structured system, this can become very chaotic. The Incident Command System, established under the National Incident Management System, is a standardized, on-scene, all-hazards incident management approach that allows for the following:

1. The integration of facilities, equipment, personnel, procedures, and communications operating within a common organizational structure
2. A coordinated response among various jurisdictions and functional agencies, both public and private
3. Common processes for planning and managing resources⁵

The veterinarian(s) involved should be aware of their position within the Incident Command System

and communicate effectively with law enforcement and any direct reports assigned to assist them.

On a local level, veterinarians asked to be involved in a large-scale cruelty case will likely have colleagues with whom they already have a relationship, and a medical team can be developed. It is helpful to have made such contacts and develop a plan prior to an incident, so that this team can be pulled together quickly and efficiently. Such a team might include individual veterinarians, veterinary clinics, vet schools and students, local rescue organizations, local emergency response personnel, and other individuals and groups. This communication is also important for a plan moving forward after the animals are seized, given that they will need ongoing care, housing, and documentation of conditions and improvement. It is also important to communicate clearly with incident command as to who will be covering payment for services rendered, covering the costs of diagnostic testing as recommended for health and evidentiary purposes, and the costs of animal care and housing post seizure and through adjudication.

When large-scale cases arise that exceed a locality's abilities or resources, there are a variety of national organizations, such as the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), which can provide direct (boots-on-the-ground) assistance to law enforcement at the local, state, and federal level and can be tailored to fit the needs at hand. The ASPCA and others also provide grant funding to law enforcement across the country to support their work in animal-abuse cases. For more information on assistance available at the ASPCA, please visit www.aspcapro.org.

The initial number of veterinarians needed on a case will depend on the number of animals, number of scenes involved, and somewhat on the experience of the veterinarians and the suspected condition of the animals. On scene, the forensic veterinarian is responsible for the identification and documentation of animal evidence as well as non-animal medical evidence. An on scene, treatment veterinarian may also be necessary to focus on patient care, such as handling critical animals, which may be sent to a predetermined facility off site after being stabilized. A federally accredited veterinarian should be on scene to perform Coggins testing and issue health certificates as needed.

Moving forward into veterinary forensic examinations, a good rule of thumb is to have a veterinary forensic team for every 50 equids to complete examinations within a few days depending on the extent of the medical conditions present. Ideally, these teams would include a veterinarian, handler, technician, and a scribe. The person responsible for photographs (typically the veterinarian) should be familiar with the equipment to obtain clear, useful images, which are an accurate depiction of the evidence.

5. Identification, Collection, and Preservation of Evidence

To assist law enforcement with an investigation of potential animal abuse the veterinarian must understand the basics of evidence identification, collection and preservation. Evidence is generally defined as anything that can demonstrate or disprove a fact in contention.^{6,7} Such facts may be anticipated based on the applicable laws as well as prior experiences.⁷ More specifically, evidence is used to demonstrate guilt or innocence, to identify victims, and to identify suspects.^{6,7} Care must be taken to ensure the integrity of each item of evidence, given that everything must be done with the ultimate goal in mind to withstand scrutiny in the courtroom.⁷ The veterinarian must recognize that their duty is to the court, assisting the trier of fact (the judge or the jury) in understanding the evidence at hand and in effect, act as an advocate for the truth.⁷

To determine what may be important evidence in a given case, the crime scene and the forensic examination should be approached within the context of potential criminal prosecution.⁷ Questions must be considered and answers sought within this context.⁷ Again, such questions will be based on the applicable laws, prior experiences, as well as specific questions that law enforcement may be trying to address.⁷

Veterinarians must be familiar with the processing of an animal crime scene, specifically as it relates to their role on scene. Initially the scene will be secured by law enforcement before anyone will be allowed on scene.⁷ Once the scene is secured, documentation should begin and typically will occur in phases as follows.⁷

Phase 1: Document the Condition in Which the Scene was Found Upon Arrival

This should include overall photos and possibly video of the areas covered under the search warrant. This phase is typically completed by law enforcement.

Phase 2: Documentation of Each Animal and Their Environment

This phase can be further broken down into stages.

Stage 1: Critical Triage

Critical triage is conducted during the veterinarian's initial walkthrough of the property. Triage on scene is a rapid, visual sorting of animals for examination and treatment priority based on their medical condition. Critical triage is done to identify animals in immediate need of medical care and is the responsibility of the veterinarian.

Critical triage requires an expedited intake procedure to provide necessary and timely medical treatment. Intake requires assignment of a unique animal identification number and documentation of

the animal in situ. Documentation should include photographs as well as written notes. It is important to remember that each animal is an individual item of evidence. In the case of a critical animal requiring immediate treatment, this evidence will be altered the moment treatment begins. Document the animal as thoroughly as possible prior to beginning treatment, but obviously not at the expense of causing the animal further distress (Fig. 1).

Step 2: Intake Triage

Following critical triage, noncritical animals should be more closely assessed and their environment documented. Intake triage should be conducted by the veterinarian during the second walkthrough of the property. It is imperative that the living conditions of each animal not be altered in any way until they have been observed by a veterinarian, documented, and photographed.

During intake triage, animals requiring a more in-depth assessment or treatment on scene prior to transport should be flagged. A simple color-coding system to use is red for critical animals, yellow for animals that require further assessment and documentation or treatment prior to transport, and green for animals that are ready for transport. Blue may be used for animals that are exhibiting signs of infectious disease. These animals, unless critical, will then be handled last and transported separately, if possible. Ideally, there is an isolation area set up in the barn or shelter that will be housing the animals off site. Again, be sure to document as thoroughly as possible prior to initiating any treatment on any animal, given that any evidence will be altered from this point forward.

It is imperative to document each individual animal's living conditions, given that they may hold information that will either contradict or corroborate the animal's physical examination findings (Figs. 2 and 5). Therefore, it is important to be able to accurately illustrate the living conditions from which each individual animal came and demonstrate how that environment may have directly affected the animal. This is especially true in cases of neglect. Given this importance, the veterinarian must take an active role in this documentation, including scene notes and photographs. If the veterinarian is not the photographer, the veterinarian should be actively directing the photographer to get the necessary images. The veterinarian is the person who will also identify other details, such as quids of hay on the ground, or toxic plants eaten down along the fence line in a dry lot. In addition, the location of each animal will need to be documented by either a sketch or other mapping technique. This is ideally completed by a crime scene analyst or technician.

Stage 3: Deceased Animals

Deceased animals are considered noncritical and are often given a non-animal physical evidence item

number rather than an animal identification number when seized in conjunction with live animals. Such a numbering system helps to eliminate confusion. If deceased horses are to be necropsied, the loading, transport, and location of necropsy should be predetermined to avoid delay (Fig. 3).

Stage 4: Post-Removal Photos

Following the removal of each animal, more thorough documentation of the living space can be completed. Mid-range and close-up photos of the living space should be completed once the animal has been removed. Such photos should include, but are not limited to, any receptacles, presence or lack of food and water, quality of food and water, shelter and fence construction and possible hazards, feces, and urine (Fig. 4). It may also be necessary to record the dimensions of the living enclosure in comparison with the measurements of the animal housed within the space. Such measurements can be recorded on the sketch showing the location of each animal. In a group or pasture situation, be sure to note the numbers and sizes of horses expected to use one shelter.

Phase 3: Non-Animal Evidence

In addition to recognizing and documenting animal evidence, the forensic veterinarian may assist law enforcement with the identification of non-animal medical and also non-medical evidence. This could include items such as medications, supplements and surgical supplies, or identification of implements having certain purposes (Fig. 6). Some items of evidence may be overlooked by law enforcement officers who are not familiar with the particular crime type. Similarly, a forensic veterinarian can assist law enforcement with the potential evidentiary value of an item, given that they may not be aware of an item's full evidentiary value.

Phase 4: Document the Condition of the Scene Upon Exit

This should include overall photos and possibly video of the areas covered under the search warrant. This phase is typically completed by law enforcement.

Evidence will also be identified, collected, and preserved during the forensic examination. Veterinarians must be familiar with the necessary components of a forensic examination of both live and deceased victims. A forensic medical examination is a detailed and thorough examination performed to methodically document examination findings and facilitate the collection of evidence from the patient's body. Like any other physical examination or necropsy, this examination should be performed in a systematic manner, noting all normal and abnormal findings and evaluating all body systems. There should also be a standard protocol for each animal. This protocol may vary from case to case depending

on the type and scale but the same protocol should be used for each animal in a given case.

Forensic examinations should occur as soon as rational. They may occur on scene but tend to occur more commonly off scene given the uncontrolled environment and lack of access to necessary equipment on scene. However, cursory or brief exams as mentioned previously may be conducted on scene to provide necessary treatments prior to transport as well as document transient evidence, such as mild dehydration.

Photographs are a fundamental component of a forensic examination. In addition to written notes, photographs should be obtained for several different purposes.

1. Identify the victim
2. Demonstrate the condition of the evidence at the time of discovery
3. Record and document evidence that cannot be preserved or left unaltered
4. Allow for later review of the evidence
5. Document injuries or conditions and record what they looked like before and after medical intervention
6. Illustrate and supplement a written report
7. Demonstrate the absence or presence of alleged findings
8. Present in a court of law, the items of evidence as they were found, thereby validating the testimony being presented^{7,8}

Forensic examination photos should be taken in a series with the first photo depicting a photo board clearly stating the case number, date, location, or address where the photos are being taken, the animal identification number and the photographer's name. The second photo of the series should be of the animal with the photo board (Fig. 7). Subsequent photos do not need to contain the photo board but may contain a smaller label as needed. Overall photos should be the third step in the series, treating the animal like a cube, obtain a photo of all six sides of the animal, as allowable given the species. Overall photos should be followed by orientation photos (Figs. 8 and 9). Any findings should be photographed in greater detail, starting with an orientation photo so the viewer understands where on the body the finding is located. The orientation photo is followed by a close-up photo with and without a forensic ruler. The scale or ruler serves various purposes but most importantly it demonstrates that the photo is a clear and accurate representation of the finding observed. This is performed by clearly identifying color, if any distortion is present and that the photo is in focus.⁷ The forensic ruler also provides measurement.⁷ It is important to note that photos should never be erased, if taken by mistake or of poor quality, they should still be retained.⁷ Deleting images can create a gap in the metadata which could be called into question.⁷

In addition to being competent in the identification of evidence on scene and on the body, the veterinarian also needs to be competent in the collection and preservation of evidence. Evidence is commonly lost as it may go undetected or disregarded or fail to be properly collected or preserved. In order for evidence to be authenticated in court, it must be accounted for at all times. This is done to demonstrate that the item was not tampered with and is in fact the item that was removed from the crime scene or animal. In addition to witness testimony, a chain of custody and evidence packaging are used to demonstrate authentication. A chain of custody is the chronological documentation of every person who has had contact with the item from the time it was seized until it is disposed of. This includes how the item was packaged, the persons involved, dates, times, and purposes of all transfers. All items of evidence should be accompanied by their original evidence receipt or chain of custody.⁷ An example of a chain of evidence form is available at: <http://aspcapro.org/resource/disaster-cruelty-animal-cruelty-animal-fighting/sample-documents-cruelty-cases>.

Items of evidence must be properly packaged to prevent loss or degradation.⁷ Reference manuals such as *Crime Scene Investigation: A Guide for Law Enforcement*, published by the National Forensic Science Center should be consulted to ensure proper packaging.^{7,9} Evidence must also be properly identified, labeled, and secured. The container label should include the following:

1. The case number
2. The item number
3. The investigating agency
4. Location of collection
5. Description of the item
6. Name of the individual who collected the item
7. The date and time the item was collected⁷

To properly secure evidence, it should be properly sealed and stored. To seal an item of evidence, the package should be secured with frangible evidence tape, which bears the packager's initials and the date the item was packaged. Care should be taken so that these items cross over the evidence tape onto the package. Evidence should be stored in a secure location with access restricted and monitored. Protocols should be in place for evidence storage and items should be signed in and out of storage. Evidence should not be disposed of until written consent has been obtained from the submitting agency. Disposal should be documented on the original evidence receipt, which should be retained.⁷

6. Forensic Veterinary Statement

The veterinarian will determine an opinion based on the facts of a case. These facts will come from the history, medical examination findings, crime scene findings, diagnostic and forensic test results, as well



Fig. 1. Critical intake of a down yearling, moved via sled during a seizure on a cold December evening. Photo courtesy of Natalie Bruyette.

as potentially other sources. These facts will need to be proven in a final report, which may be referred to as the forensic veterinary statement. The responsibility to “prove” or “disprove” a case does not lie on the veterinarian. The case investigation is a multidisciplinary approach and veterinary evidence is only part of the case. Ultimately, it is the prosecutor's duty to prove the case and the judge or juror's duty to decide guilt or innocence. The veterinarian should simply present the facts and their interpretation or conclusions drawn from these facts.

The purpose of the forensic veterinary statement is to clearly convey the facts of the case, which fall into the veterinarian's area of expertise, to assist the judge and/or jury in understanding the evidence at hand. The forensic veterinary statement must educate the investigators, prosecutor or defense attorney, the judge, and the jury. Therefore, this statement is not necessarily directed toward other veterinarians and must be easily understood by the lay audience it is intended for. The veterinarian must ensure that the court understands the evidence while also acting as an advocate for the truth. However, the veterinarian must be aware of their limitations remaining within their area of expertise, understand the gaps in veterinary forensic science, and not extend beyond what the current science allows for us to state. The veterinarian must be impartial and only draw conclusions based on what the evidence shows.

Unfortunately, there is no standard format for the veterinary forensic statement; however, it is more than just your physical examination findings. The authors recommend that the following components be included in the veterinary forensic statement involving live animals.

1. Introduction
 - a. Investigating agency, lead officer, this agency case number and animal identification number
 - b. Reason for the examination



Fig. 2. It is important to document the animal in situ in its living conditions. Make sure to note items such as unsafe fencing, empty water troughs or water quality (if available), lack of food or quality of food (if available), and numbers and sizes of horses using shelter available.

- c. Date, time, and location of the examination
- d. Signalment and other identifying information regarding the animal
- 2. Crime scene findings
 - a. Personal observations or information provided
- 3. History
 - a. A medical history for the animal may or may not be available
- 4. Medical findings
 - a. Pertinent physical examination findings with reference to complete examination findings
 - b. Pain assessment as applicable
 - c. Diagnostic tests and results, listing and explaining all results
 - d. Treatments provided and response
- 5. Conclusions



Fig. 3. The weather may hinder the removal of a deceased animal for necropsy, as in this case where the horse was frozen to the ground.



Fig. 4. Post removal photo depicting an empty water trough.

- a. Summary of findings, opinions and discussion
- b. Note duration of conditions, the long-term and short-term effects, conditions that should have been apparent to the owner/caregiver and conditions that are preventable/care that should have been provided

The authors recommend that a forensic necropsy report included the following components.

- 1. Introduction
 - a. Investigating agency, lead officer, this agencies case number and animal identification number
 - b. Purpose of the necropsy
 - c. Date, time, and location of the necropsy
 - d. Those in attendance
 - e. Signalment and other identifying information regarding the animal
- 2. Crime Scene Findings



Fig. 5. Photo demonstrating the response of horses when water was added to an empty trough. These horses were untouchable on scene, and needed to be watered prior to transport although forensic examinations had not yet been performed. The photo is compelling, but video may have been an even a better option.



Fig. 6. Photo depicting boxes of medications and veterinary supplies found on a scene.



Fig. 8. Close-up photo of a lesion using the ABFO No. 2 scale. This should be the third photo of a lesion, an orientation photo and a photo without the scale.

- a. Personal observations or information provided
- 3. History
 - a. A medical history for the animal may or may not be available
- 4. Gross description of findings
 - a. Presentation of the body
 - b. Postmortem changes
 - c. External examination findings
 - d. Internal examination findings



Fig. 7. Second photo of the series, including the animal with the photo board. Note that the animal is also marked with identification number from prior transport.

- 5. Gross diagnosis
- 6. Ancillary procedures, laboratory tests and results
 - a. List and explain
- 7. Cause of death
 - a. May also include manner of death, any contributory causes of death, mechanism of death, and estimated postmortem interval as applicable
- 8. Comments/Conclusions
 - a. Interpretation and explanation of findings
 - i. May be able to address duration and degree of pain and suffering as applicable
 - ii. May want to note if the death is an approved method of humane euthanasia (AVMA guidelines on euthanasia)



Fig. 9. Good intra-oral images of dental conditions can be very compelling evidence of neglect.

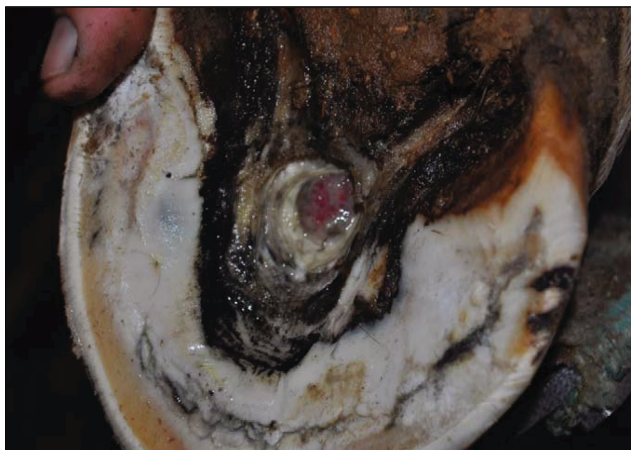


Fig. 10. Be sure to photograph everything, including treatments (e.g., farrier work) and findings during these processes.

Keep your audience in mind when writing your report. Your target audience is the lay individual, such as law enforcement, lawyers, a judge or the jury rather than another veterinarian. You should use appropriate medical terminology but explain what it means so that the lay reader can easily understand your report. In addition, it may be beneficial to summarize findings in conjunction with photographs to enhance understanding and further illustrate the magnitude of the condition. If there are numerous animals involved in a case consider using a table or chart to summarize the findings as well. Such tables or charts may be useful for the judge and/or jury and may serve as a reference during trial. Remember that all e-mails, photos, notes, and any other documents related to a case are discoverable and should be maintained and provided as requested. With this in mind, you should always approach all aspects of the case in an unbiased and professional manner. All original documents and photographs should be maintained. Feel free to make clean copies of your notes but always retain the originals. Photographs should be maintained in a system in which they cannot be altered and protocols should be in place for the handling of photographic evidence, given that you may be questioned about the integrity of your photos in court. Copies of photographs may be altered; however, you must maintain the original unaltered copy and document all changes made.

7. Conclusion

The veterinarian has a multifaceted role within the investigation of a potential case of animal abuse, including crime scene investigation, the examination of potentially both live and deceased animals, authoring a forensic veterinary statement and the provision of expert witness testimony. The veterinarian may become involved in a case by either initiating an investigation by reporting a suspected or known case of animal abuse or conversely may be asked by law enforcement to assist with an investigation. Veterinarians must be familiar with the applicable animal cruelty laws in a given jurisdiction as well as have knowledge of the appropriate law enforcement entity to which they should report suspected or known abuse. In addition, veterinarians assisting law enforcement with a potential case of animal abuse must have a thorough understanding of their role and how to identify, collect, and preserve veterinary forensic evidence.

Acknowledgments

Declaration of Ethics

The Authors have adhered to the Principles of the Veterinary Medical Ethics of the AVMA.

Conflict of Interest

The Authors are employed by the ASPCA.

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