

Equine Specialists Treat Colicky Miniature Therapy Horse

Cherokee, a 2-year-old miniature therapy horse, was recently brought to the veterinary hospital's Large Animal Clinic with a persistent case of colic that her local veterinarian was unable to treat. On presentation, Cherokee had a distended abdomen, was uncomfortable, and required sedation. Radiographs indicated an intestinal impaction and gas distension. An intravenous catheter was placed in hopes of treating the case non-surgically.

The veterinary hospital has been able to non-surgically treat 70 percent of patients with colic, an abdominal pain that can indicate a blockage or twisting of the intestines. When horses do not respond to fluid and other medical treatments, surgery is generally required. UC Davis currently performs nearly 100 colic surgeries per year, with more than a 90 percent success rate. Historically, success rates with colic surgeries at the veterinary hospital are 3 percent higher than worldwide published data.

Surgeries can involve a manual untwisting of the intestine or possible resection if the twisting has irreparably damaged the intestine. In cases of intestinal blockage, the objects are surgically removed if the horse is unable to pass the object on its own. Common causes of impaction include feed, enteroliths, worms, sand, and the occasional foreign body.

As colic is one of the most common causes of death in horses, Cherokee's case was taken extremely seriously, and she was immediately admitted to the ICU and started on intravenous fluids and laxatives. She was uncomfortable overnight and received analgesics to manage her pain. The next morning, Cherokee was given more aggressive medical treatment, because she had not responded to initial attempts. Thankfully, this treatment worked, and she started passing manure.

After four days of hospitalization, Cherokee was taken home where she resumed her job as a certified therapy horse for autistic and other special needs children. Her owner, Denise Parsons, a retired dog groomer, uses many of her 17 pets as therapy animals and educational tools for children. After an animal helped her successfully cope with a disability years ago, Parsons wants to show others how animals can make a big difference and have a positive influence in people's lives.



Cherokee, a mini therapy horse, was treated for colic at the veterinary hospital.