Pelvic Misalignment
ALTERNATIVE VETERINARY MEDICINE CENTRE
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PELVIC MISALIGNMENT IN ANIMALS

(its effects, its signs, its meaning and its correction)

Pelvic misalignment is a common problem in animal patients, of whatever species. It is a significant cause of disability and diminished activity. It is important to perform correction of this finding in conjunction with a complete spinal and cranial examination and manipulation but it is not uncommon to find just this misalignment, as the major problem.

Its effects upon the patient are mediated via two main mechanisms. Firstly the injury causes pain and secondly the physical misalignment leads to necessary compensation for it, with knock-on sequelae. If the misalignment remains uncorrected, it represents a serious obstacle to healing of other problems and is a constant source of pain and diminished or impaired performance.

The pain may be anything from slight to severe but animals always change demeanour for the better, the second the misalignment is corrected, suggesting that they are constantly aware of the problem. The pain is shown by abnormal positioning of the hind leg on the affected side, difficulty in standing squarely, unwillingness to jump, uneven gait in the hind legs, scoliosis, spasm and guarding response in the lower lumbar musculature, skin muscle reflex response to palpation, crouching upon approach and either an aggressive response or a fearful response to other animals, as a result of perceived threat. I have seen horses become very ‘bargey’ or ‘pushy’, in a stable, or avoiding contact. I have even seen major behavioural changes, e.g. a gentle mare becoming aggressive and temperamental. A horse may be uncharacteristically averse to handling over the lumbar area. Dogs will park their hind end out of harm’s way, in a consulting room corner or between obstacles, when being examined. Of course, it is at first difficult to know whether these various signs may be part of the animal’s basic make-up but, should they alter after manipulation, then these are almost certainly abnormal traits, adopted as a result of the pain.

The misalignment itself results in imperfect posture. It is not dissimilar in effect to a misaligned rear axle in a motor vehicle, except that the motor car cannot compensate in the way the body can. The problem can be objectively detected by standing the patient four-square, with head pointing straight ahead. When this position is attained, sometimes with great difficulty in an affected patient, a scoliosis is quite clear. The pelvic axis is not at all aligned with the head and spine. As a result of this physical imperfection, uneven stresses and strains are put upon the limbs and upon the rest of the axial skeletal system. Compensation results, in order for the animal to maintain its level of activity as much as possible. Further misalignments and injuries can therefore follow. Whether from pain or mechanical compensation, or even a combination of these, the contra-lateral shoulder may become misaligned, requiring correction at the same visit. Interestingly, in most horses presented for treatment of tendon injury, the contra-lateral pelvic misalignment is found to be present, suggesting that pelvic misalignment may lead to tendon injury.

The exact origin and nature of the lesion is obscure. It may even vary between patients. The possibilities are stresses within the lumbo-sacral joint and slipping of the sacro-iliac joint. It may result from uneven muscle spasm of the lumbar muscles, for example from painful saddling. An observation yet to be explained is that it makes a great difference to the patient and to the method of correction, whether the misalignment is ‘forward’ or ‘backward’. The latter lesion is apparently much more painful to the patient, judging from exacerbated signs and responses. The laterality is first to be discerned by observing which limb is affected. Whether it is forward or back then becomes clear, upon careful examination. There may also be rotation of the pelvis and sacrum, around the animal’s axis line.

Correction of the misalignment is achieved by chiropractic-type manipulation. This consists firstly of supplying ‘information’ to the patient, as to direction, then secondly, by stimulating a corrective response by applying a short sharp stimulus.

In a minority of cases, whether from overstretched retaining structures or from repeated injury, the misalignment can revert, after adjustment. If this occurs more than three times, in quick succession (owners are well-able to spot the relapse) acupuncture or the injection of acupuncture points can, in our experience, return the area to more normal stability.

Many patients come for other, seemingly unrelated problems. The pelvic misalignment is found incidentally, as a result of careful routine examination. In some cases, the misalignment may be the direct cause of the presenting complaint. I have seen relief given to cases diagnosed as spondylosis, hip dysplasia and other named conditions, as a result of natural association of the

apparent hindquarter pain and the evidence on X-Ray of skeletal abnormalities. For some reason, I have not witnessed diagnosis of pelvic misalignment either by scan or by X-Ray investigation.

I have seen several cats, presented on account of vague but worrying signs of diminished activity and generally decreased well-being, without diagnosis of any medical problem, who have responded rapidly upon correction of pelvic misalignment. In these cases, rigorous diagnostic attempts by the referring veterinary surgeon have failed to reveal any abnormality. Horses that are fractious in the stable may also respond to appropriate manipulation.

It is to be hoped that sharing this information will result in improved welfare for the great many animals that presently suffer the problem but remain undetected. It is a source of great sadness to me, when driving around the country in the course of my work, to see horses being ridden on the roads who clearly have pelvic misalignment. I have even seen draught horses in tourist towns and reindeer in Lapland, with this problem yet asked to work. If a horse appears to be unequal in his work, from one rein to another, pelvic misalignment must be high on the list of possible causes.

See also:
http://www.chiropractic-vet.co.uk
http://www.equineacupuncturevet.co.uk

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