

Cooperation



It's important for farriers and veterinarians to work together.



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THE EARLIEST BLACKSMITHS CAN BE FOUND IN the Book of Genesis, Chapter 4, Verse 22. They continue to be an important partner in the daily care of the horse. Equine veterinary medicine was established as early as 2000 BC in Babylon, and the Ancient Greeks had physicians literally called "horse doctors."

Many of the ancient farriers and veterinarians probably argued over who knew more about the structure and function of the horse's foot and proper treatment of lameness problems – much like today.

Education

Today's veterinarians must complete several years of education and pass national and state examinations and a clinical competency test before practicing. Although they are well educated in the normal anatomy and physiology of the horse, as well as the diagnosis and treatment of diseases and lameness, few receive formal training in shoeing horses.

In comparison, farriers are allowed both the benefits – and detriments – encountered in a profession with minimal regulation. Prior to entering practice, farriers can attend a farrier school or learn through an apprenticeship with an established farrier. Although farrier schools provide training on anatomy, function and diseases of the foot, farriers aren't required by national or state regulations to pass competency tests before starting practice.

In recent years the American Farrier's Association (AFA) has instituted a rigorous voluntary program of education and testing for its members. The highest level offered by the AFA is certified journeyman farrier, which requires that they have at least two years of experience and complete an advanced written test and a practical examination requiring them to shoe a horse with hand-made shoes.

AFA certification doesn't mean that farriers are good at their jobs, only that they have met certain qualifications. The same is true of some recently graduated veterinarians who may not possess the skill to be lameness experts.

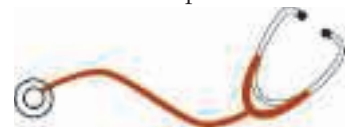
Working together

Experienced veterinarians are formally educated in lameness diagnosis and possess tools to make a diagnosis. However, many have no formal training in balancing and shoeing a foot. Competent farriers have hands-on training and extensive experience in caring for the lower leg and foot, but they often lack the formal education and tools to make an extensive lameness diagnosis. Obviously, a natural synergy exists between veterinarians and farriers.

Unfortunately, egos and conflicts often strain the relationship between some farriers, veterinarians and horse owners. Communication and cooperation based on a mutual respect of each other's professional training and responsibility are the only solution.

The AFA and the American Association of Equine Practitioners, in response to the question of legal liability in the performance of their duties, defined responsibilities for equine professionals. Farriers keep a horse's feet in balance with its conformation, and are therefore the most important variable in the long-term soundness of the horse. Veterinarians are trained and licensed to provide a diagnosis and a prescription for therapy in lameness problems. This often involves consultation with farriers about the best alternatives in trimming and corrective shoeing to resolve the problem. With good cooperation, communication and mutual respect, everyone wins and the horse receives the best available therapy.

As an owner, if you get caught in a disagreement between your veterinarian and farrier, seek another opinion. If you are new to the area and are looking for a new farrier or veterinarian, make sure that they are updated on the latest therapeutic techniques and attend continuing education courses regularly. Look for people with experience in lameness who want to work together. True professionals are current, communicate well and realize the potential benefits of the exchange of ideas between their professionals. ■



For more information on keeping your horse healthy, consult an American Association of Equine Practitioners-member veterinarian in your area. For a list of members, log onto www.aep.org.