

Groundbreaking research to improve diagnosis of colic in horses

October 13 2015, by Emma Rayner



Experts in one of the most dangerous health problems in horses have just published new research which could transform the way the condition is diagnosed and treated by vets and horse-owners.

The two new studies, carried out by researchers at The University of Nottingham's Vet School, have looked at the first assessment of more than 1,000 [horses](#) with [colic](#), and also asked more than 200 [vets](#) how they go about diagnosing colic.

The papers are published in the *Vet Record* and Biomed Central journal *Acta Veterinaria Scandinavica*. They are the first published analysis of the initial presentation of colic, which identified key, early differences between critical and non-critical cases, and a comparison of how first evaluations of horses are conducted by vets. The research is intended to help owners and vets recognise critical cases as early as possible, and

improve the selection of diagnostic tests used to assess horses with signs of colic.

Colic is the most common emergency problem in horses and is one of the main causes of death. There is a range of different causes, ranging from intestinal spasms, to the gut dying due to becoming trapped, and this can make diagnosis difficult.

An early and accurate diagnosis is crucial in trying to prevent cases becoming critical or fatal. The research has found that there was a marked variation in how the cohort of 228 veterinary practitioners who took part in the survey approached suspected colic. It also identified some of the main factors that affect vets' decisions, including safety concerns of performing some procedures in the field.

The research team has developed an online survey for vets and horse-owners to develop some new guidelines on the recognition and diagnosis of colic, and are working with equine organisations and charities to disseminate the final outcomes of new 'best practice' guidelines.

Professor Sarah Freeman, from the Nottingham Vet School, said: "Our research has shown that colic is the condition that horse owners consider to be the most important emergency problem, and one of the most common 'out of hours' emergencies seen by vets. It can have catastrophic consequences without any warning, and is probably one of the most painful conditions the horse can suffer, so it has huge health and welfare impacts."

PhD student, Laila Curtis, has dedicated her PhD, to her horse, Albert, who died from colic. She said: "If the Nottingham Colic Project can save one life by improving the recognition, diagnosis and therefore treatment of colic, I would consider that an enormous achievement."

More information: Laila Curtis et al. "Prospective study of the primary evaluation of 1016 horses with clinical signs of abdominal pain by veterinary practitioners, and the differentiation of critical and non-critical cases," *Acta Veterinaria Scandinavica* (2015). [DOI: 10.1186/s13028-015-0160-9](https://doi.org/10.1186/s13028-015-0160-9)

"Veterinary practitioners' selection of diagnostic tests for the primary evaluation of colic in the horse" *Vet Rec Open* 2015;2:2 e000145 [DOI: 10.1136/vetreco-2015-000145](https://doi.org/10.1136/vetreco-2015-000145)

Provided by University of Nottingham

Citation: Groundbreaking research to improve diagnosis of colic in horses (2015, October 13) retrieved 10 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2015-10-groundbreaking-diagnosis-colic-horses.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--