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INSIGHTS IN THE INSIDE OF THE FOALING MARE

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Introduction

In the mare the foaling process is usually swift and uncomplicated. However a thorough knowledge of the normal course of birth is essential to identify any abnormality and notify timely professional help in case of a dystocia. It is not always equally clear what can be catalogued within normal behaviour and symptoms during the birth process and what can be called the start of an abnormal, if not timely remedied, life threatening situation. Proper education of the veterinarian and foaling attendant and a close surveillance will prevent most calamities

Equine obstetrics

Most foaling's happen uneventful, and a pre foaling check-up might reassure the breeder and in the meantime gives the veterinarian the possibility to go through the normal events during the foaling process and draw the attention to some critical points in the birth process. A profound knowledge of the normal parturition will enable the stable staff to recognize abnormalities, to intervene in time and to notify the veterinarian in case of emergency.

Although the incidence of dystocia in horses is low, varying from 4-20% depending on the breed, it remains a major clinical challenge because of the explosive nature of the equine parturition. The fact that time-lapse between the rupture of the chorio-allantoic membrane and the expulsion of the foal has a profound effect on the survival rate of the foal (Frazer et al. 1999, Norton et al. 2007) and the risks of suffocation of the foal in case of a premature placental separation or red bag delivery makes a prompt intervention essential to safe-guard the foal's chances for survival in case of dystocia's. Prompt intervention to release the foal in case of red bag deliveries is warranted but, on the other hand, as soon as it becomes obvious that a dystocia needs to be referred, it is better to leave the mare undisturbed to avoid extra straining and labour activity which will promote placental separation and thus will worsen the foal's prognosis (Byron et al. 2002).

However a dystocia requires efficient diagnosing and the mastery of a broad knowledge base and interventions skills to handle emergency situations (Schmid et al. 1994). Due to the seasonality in equine breeding management, obtaining experience without a good initial insight into the different possibilities of dystocia, is difficult. Previous experience in bovine obstetrics is very helpful to get sufficient skills in intra-uterine manipulations especially since only small numbers of obstetrical cases in horses impedes winning experience (Schmid et al. 1994, Frazer 2002). Nonetheless, for many young veterinarians the need exists to gain more experience and an increased exposure to routine cases in obstetrics.

Although resolving malpostures and malpositions still relies on 'old fashion' reposition or mutation techniques nowadays they can be learned in a 'better, modern and innovative fashioned way' (Govaere et al. 2011, 2014). Since equine obstetrics presents an instructional challenge due to the complex nature of the knowledge domain, a multimedia instructional DVD, containing 3-dimensional animations of the foaling mare, facilitates knowledge and skills acquisition to an audience without profound prior knowledge. Animated movies to learn procedural skills are far more rewarding than static illustrations and far less stressful concerning cognitive load impact. As such veterinarians are able to learn *and* teach equine obstetrics which will contribute to a better care for the horse and a better service to the owner.

Conclusion

In the end, it should be emphasized that, although dystocia is always disquieting and can have a guarded prognosis for the foal and mare, the vast majority of foaling's happen uneventful. The more 'easy' abnormalities should be identified and corrected as soon as possible, while in other cases, one should immediately diagnose and recognize those cases that need to be referred in order to guarantee the most optimal outcome for foal, mare and the mare's future fertility.

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