

Dr. Barrie Grant, DVM Equine Wobbler Syndrome



The everyday horse owner has their own team of professionals to provide the best in care for their horses, at the center of which is their valued veterinarian. Vets are often the unsung heroes in the horse world, not usually for creating treatments, which change equine healthcare history, but for the basic everyday care and advice they give. However, there is one local Southern California vet who has not only changed equine healthcare history, but was honored to work his magic on one of America's greatest race horses, Seattle Slew.

Dr. Barrie Grant was among the team who pioneered the equine spinal fusion basket surgery in 1977 while at WSU. The surgery placed a basket between the vertebrae, which was completely "on the cutting edge" at the time. In 2000, he worked on world class racing athlete, Seattle Slew and inserted a basket which is now called a "Seattle Slew implant" to stabilize the spine. It was reported that the crippling spinal cord compression was alleviated through these surgeries. Thus the equine world of healthcare was changed forever and now the treatments for Wobbler Syndrome have become much more commonplace.



For horse owners everywhere, the potential diagnosis of Wobbler Syndrome is daunting. According to Dr. Grant's website, an "Equine Wobbler" is a horse with a damaged spinal cord. A horse may be a wobbler if one or more of the following signs are present: 1) stumbling or stumbles more often under saddle; 2) abnormal wear of front toes, or unusual sores on front heels from over-reaching; 3) excessive movement of tail when trotting; 4) the horse will bunny hop when cantering in pasture; 5) excessive knuckling of hind legs when stopping; and 6) outward rotation of hind toes when the horse is going uphill. The most obvious clinical sign is an abnormal gait but in mild cases the owner may report their horse is "just a little off". Also according to Dr. Grant, the major causes of spinal cord damage include malformation of the cervical vertebra, age of horse, trauma or fracture to the vertebra from falling, viral (herpes or rhinopneumonitis) and protozoa (Sarcocystis neurona) infections commonly called EPM. The clinical signs of each of these problems can be very similar as each one can damage the spinal cord in the neck region.

Diagnosis strategies should include a neurological exam, standing cervical radiographs, and a Myelogram, which checks the compression of the spinal cord. Additional diagnostics include blood tests which can test for viruses, and possibly nuclear scans which are especially helpful with cases including arthritic changes. With his expertise, Dr. Grant can identify which of these options can lead to the most conclusive diagnosis.

Dr. Grant now practices mainly on Equine Wobbler Syndrome, working for clients from all over the world to those horse owners right in his backyard of San Diego County. Dr. Grant does other surgeries including: Stylohyoid Osteoarthropathy, which usually presents as a wobbler with a head tilt, leg amputations, and tie backs to name a few. Dr. Grant will work right alongside a horse owner's regular veterinarian, for diagnosis and treatment of Wobbler Syndrome. Once diagnosed, Dr. Grant, the horse owner, and their regular veterinarian can work together toward the most appropriate path of treatment, which may include cervical spinal surgery performed by Dr. Grant. These surgeries are often effective, with proper rehabilitation and time. Many factors are weighed as to choosing surgery, recovery from surgery and the potential use for the horse after rehabilitation. Dr. Grant has performed surgery on horses who have returned to all different types of work including horse racing, jumping, dressage, and breeding.

Dr. Grant's website, www.equinewobblers.com, is a very informative source for learning more about Equine Wobbler Syndrome, the clinical signs and diagnosis, the possible treatments and the potential for a productive life for the horse after the onset on this condition. Horse owners and Veterinarians can get more information or set up a consultation or neurological exam by contacting Dr. Grant via phone at (760) 585-6158 or email at barriegrant@equinewobblers.com or by contacting his assistant, Jan at: jan@equinewobblers.com. Time is of the essence in effective treatment of Equine Wobbler Syndrome – whether it affects a famous racehorse or your favorite family equine, Dr. Barrie Grant is here to help!

Article written by Sue Schindler for SoCalEquine.com. To have your Healthcare Business as our Home Page Feature article, please contact Sue via email at sue@socalequine.com or call 951-440-2492.