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DO'S AND DON'TS OF TREATING HOOF CANKER

Equine proliferative pododermatitis or 'canker' is characterised by chronic hypertrophy of horn-producing tissues, mainly in the frog region. The disease has been considered to occur mainly in draft horses, but other breeds can be equally affected. Most horses have several hooves affected, although involvement of one single hoof can occur.
The etiology remains obscure: infectious agents such as bacteria, viruses, fungi and spirochetes have all been suggested, but environmental conditions (wet and/or unhygienic environment) have also been blamed as stimulating factors. It is worth remembering that the mere presence of one or more infectious agents does not satisfy the requirements of Koch's postulates for a causative organism for a disease. Moreover, even an immunological aetiology has been hypothesised. Possibly, worldwide, there may be several different etiologies, at least partially explaining the differences in clinical presentation and outcome between different studies. Diagnosis can be based on the history and pathognomonic appearance of hoof tissue, most frequently foul-smelling, cheesy masses with filamentous or cauliflower-like epithelial proliferations, often extending from the caudal part of the frog to the heel bulbs. From a practical point of view, the lack of response to a standard treatment for thrush should alert people to consider the possible involvement of canker. Unfortunately, ineffective treatments are often used very persistently, and delaying adequate treatment has been associated with a 13-fold increased risk for recurrence.[1] Besides surgical debridement and dedicated hoof care, additional oral treatment with prednisolone has been shown to significantly shorten the duration of hospitalisation and therefore is now part of our standard treatment protocol. Early recognition, prompt treatment by adequate debridement and a clean, dry environment have been identified as important factors for a successful outcome. The most common mistake in treatment is insufficient debridement; however, care must also be taken to avoid excessive removal of dermal tissue. All parties involved in caretaking of horses need increased awareness and adequate education to recognize early stages of the disease.

Reference

1. Oosterlinck, M., Deneut, K., Dumoulin, M., Gasthuys, F., Pille, F., 2011. Retrospective study on 30 horses with chronic proliferative pododermatitis (canker). Equine Veterinary Education 23, 466-471.