

The unfettered foot: a paradigm change for equine podiatry

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Abstract

The present day paradigm of equine hoof care fails to both define and solve some of the most common health problems seen in the equine industry. Traditional hoof care methods are unable to maintain soundness, nor bring lasting relief to ailing horses due to reliance on traditional farrier methods which are incompatible with the normal physiologic needs of equine species. The new paradigm of hoof care respects the hoof's ability to protect sensitive inner structures, adjust itself in response to the environment, promote proper circulation, exfoliate old tissue, replace itself over time and have a keen ability to sense the environment. Application of steel shoes prevents all of these vital functions and alters the form of hooves to such severe degrees that shod horses can not be deemed sound. Instead of providing the hoof protection, support and traction, steel shoes promote weakening and deterioration of the hoof, disrupt natural support mechanisms and disallow normal traction on all terrains. Protection for the hoof should be afforded the horse through the use of boots made of dynamic materials which complement the nature of the hoof. Veterinarians and other equine professionals are obligated to examine the evidence that shoeing horses is harmful and replace traditional hoof care practices with techniques that keep horses sound, return lame horses to health, and abandon the use of nailed on shoes, thus doing no harm to the animals.

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