

CASE REPORT: PAIN – A CAUSE OF EQUINE BEHAVIOUR ABERRATIONS (2)

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Case history

An eleven-year-old New Forest pony mare presented for aggressive behaviour to humans. The owner described her as being “cross and very irritable” and had taken her to veterinarians and ‘horse whisperers’ for several years.

Physical examination

An attempt to manually palpate the neck and back area resulted in kicking, striking and rearing. This behaviour had frequently been inadvertently reinforced in the past. The pony showed a subtle 1/5 (AAEP scale) RF lameness at the trot on a hard surface at a straight line, on the left circle 2/5 LF and on the right 2/5 RF lame. After a low palmar block RF the pony was sound on the straight line and on the right circle, but the pony became 3/5 LF lame on the left circle.

Further diagnostics

Radiological examination of both distal forelimbs revealed no bony abnormalities. At follow up MRI investigation of the RF foot, a longitudinal tear running from proximo-abaxial (PhII) to disto-axial (PhIII) was found in the medial branch of the deep digital flexor tendon (DDFT tendonitis).

Treatment and prognosis

Behaviour modification (including clicker training), modified shoeing (supportive wedge pad, rolled toe), very light restricted exercise and the temporary use of a NSAID was recommended. The pony’s behaviour significantly improved. The prognosis was guarded as the pony had shown the behaviour and had possibly suffered from the lameness, neck and back pain for a very long-time.

Conclusion

This case highlights the importance of careful history taking and a thorough physical examination with the use of further diagnostics (if necessary) when dealing with “grumpy” behaviour in horses.