

NEWS RELEASE

Media Contacts: Dr. Anthony Blikslager, 919/513-6509 or
anthony_blikslager@ncsu.edu
Greg Thomas, News Services, 919/515-3470 or
greg_thomas@ncsu.edu

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Researchers Hope to Corral Deadly, Costly Equine Colic

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Colic, a gastrointestinal disorder, is the leading cause of death in horses, and costs owners more than \$115 million each year. But researchers at North Carolina State University's College of Veterinary Medicine are identifying new methods of easing the pain of colic and speeding recovery from it.

Dr. Anthony Blikslager, assistant professor of equine surgery, says non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, like ibuprophen and aspirin, are traditionally used to treat colic, but they can cause stomach ulcers and may impair the body's ability to recover from colic. "This has been the treatment of choice for years, without much thought to what the side effects might be. It's widely known that those drugs cause ulcers, and perhaps delay recovery," Blikslager said.

Blikslager and his colleagues will use a \$290,000 grant to look at ways of using new arthritis drugs to treat colic. Cox-2 inhibitors, commercially marketed as Bextra, Vioxx and Celebrex, have the benefit of reducing stomach and intestinal damage.

The grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture was the top-rated application in the agency's animal health and well-being section. "Apparently, they feel this is an important area of research," Blikslager said. He also says the USDA is putting more resources into equine research. "I think that is partly because the equine industry has been doing a good job showing how much it contributes to the economy."

Also working on the research are NC State's Dr. Sam Jones, assistant professor of equine medicine, and Drs. Mark Crisman and Rick Howard of Virginia Tech. Crisman and Howard will investigate the genetic basis of inflammation during recovery from colic

Blikslager says that the way humans use and treat horses is part of the problem. "From an evolutionary standpoint, horses are meant to graze all day, not be forced into meal schedules

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as modern working or racing horses usually are,” he said. “So if we were willing to give some of those things up – put them out to pasture more often, not meal-feed them, not put them in a stall so often and not stress them out – we probably could reduce the overall incidence of colic and other gastrointestinal problems.”

The researchers are hoping their studies will provide the impetus to reduce colic’s effects on horses.

“We’re trying to find ways of getting them through the recovery process faster and ease the pain,” Blikslager says. “It’s really a race between repairing the gut and the absorption of bacterial toxins which are making them sick.”

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