



Your Horses Wellness Team

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YOUR HORSE'S WELLNESS TEAM

I am very proud of my role with horses. I am a therapist. I have taken the last 19 years to learn and grow towards the mastery of my field. I think body work and massage can create an immense amount of good for the horse. I feel through my palpation and deep-tissue work I can find problems before they turn into major lameness; I can create circulation that speeds healing, eliminates wastes, increases range of motion, reduces tactile defences, and softens spasms.

The skilled hands of a practitioner can use massage to evaluate tissue and point out postural issues that affect your horse's balance within their body. Postural balance affects movement, efficiency in locomotion and ultimately the concussive forces that play a huge role on joints through wear and tear on your horse. Massage helps to drain waste products and toxins, as it reduces muscle soreness and increases flexibility.

The owner or trainer of an equine athlete in any discipline will receive great value from having their horse in a thoughtful maintenance program. In my view, every performance horse should have a professional body worker as part of its wellness team. And this is the point of this article – your horse's wellness team.

No program will be complete without a great team. You may feel you have great professionals involved, but without all of the team members working together as a team, I think you and your horse will lose out. Why, you may ask? Two reasons.

For one, the body works as a whole, and as such it needs to be recognized and treated as a whole. A small angle change at the hoof will change the flight path of the leg, the movement in the shoulder, the stability in the core. If I can feel something in the soft tissue, and I don't know that another team member is in the midst of working on a change in their area of expertise, I won't be able to help the horse during this process as much as I would hope.

Recently a farrier wanted to work on shortening the breakover on the feet of a mare that I have in a monthly maintenance program. When I saw the mare, she was extremely sore in the retractor muscles and shoulder stabilizer muscles. I mentioned this to the owner and asked if we should have the veterinarian in to do an evaluation in case there was something more going on. The veterinarian did not see much cause for alarm, but wanted the massage to be stepped up. The owner did not know the feet were changed, and as the horse gained strength in the new flight path the soft tissue soreness dissipated. Now knowing all of the information, it would have been so much better for the horse and rider to have had all of the wellness team members aware of all of the details and on board to have set up a program to support the change that was going on.

Secondly, in life the body has layers, and thinking that one modality is going to heal everything and fix all the imbalances is close-minded. We would not expect one person to do our taxes, plumb in a new tub, fix the timing belt in our truck, and build new code for a computer program.



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The equine athlete is poetry in motion when all parts are functioning at their optimum level, but with a small imbalance the body starts to compensate. With that compensation comes pain, dysfunction and asymmetry. This is where your team comes in. We may all look at a problem and see a different approach to solving it, but this is the beauty of a team. Often those solutions are not that different in the end as they work towards the same successful goal, and with all the opinions you can create the ultimate wellness program for your equine athlete.

When I first started in this industry there was an old patriarchal energy that felt like you were supposed to know everything or you weren't of value. Now after my years of practice and learning, I know that if I feel something on a horse and I consult another member of that horse's wellness team I am putting my ego aside and really looking after the horse's health and wellness the best. This is what will allow that horse to thrive in sport.

So talk to your veterinarian, your farrier, your saddle fitter, your nutritionist, your trainer, your body worker and whomever else you may involve in your horse's wellness program. Ask about the willingness of each of these people to be part of a wellness team for your horse, and work with them all to ensure communication and openness between them. Your horse will be the beneficiary, and the value you receive from your team will surely exceed your expectations!