Farrier Paige Poss Leads Clinic for College of Veterinary Medicine

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05/02/2023

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Utah State University's College of Veterinary Medicine and the Utah Horseshoers Guild teamed up to host anatomist and farrier Paige Poss for a clinic on equine lower limb dissection. The event was the first of hopefully many aimed at sharing knowledge and fostering cooperation between veterinarians and farriers.

Karl Hoopes, Extension associate professor of equine medicine and behavior and member of the College of Veterinary Medicine's faculty, explained that while farriers and veterinarians are both dedicated to the well-being of horses, there can be tension between the two fields of knowledge.

"Most equine veterinarians have a close relationship with farriers, but not all of them," Hoopes said. Sometimes there's a rift between them, and I think it's because of pride. Each one recognizes themselves as the authority and doesn't really want anyone else contradicting what they know."

Hoopes does farrier work in addition to practicing veterinary medicine, putting him in an ideal position to bridge the gap between professions. Yet despite his experience in both fields, he was unfamiliar with the method of hoof dissection that Poss demonstrated at the clinic. While most veterinarians have access to x-ray machines, they offer a limited view of what is inside the hoof — and that made Poss' demonstration all the more fascinating.

"I've been a veterinarian for 20 years now since graduating in 2003, and it was amazing last week at that clinic," said Hoopes. "I'd never seen the foot dissected in that manner, to be able to understand the structures and how they relate to each other in that way."

Poss gets that reaction a lot. She's largely self-trained as a hoof-care provider and anatomist, leading her to develop her own approach to the field. As a hands on-learner, Poss found that taking limbs apart helped her to better understand hooves both spatially and mechanically. Since she was merely trying to enhance her own learning, she experimented with dissecting the hooves in various ways. It never occurred to Poss that this was different or unique.

She related a story about when two classically trained farriers from the United Kingdom visited her makeshift lab in her garage, and one of them didn't believe Poss' technique could work.

"I said that if I cut right here, I'll be able to remove the soft tissue at the back of the hoof and not hit the coffin bone," Poss said. "And one of these two guys said that he'd eat his hat if I didn't hit it. And of course, I immediately took my knife and just whacked it all off. The other guy was laughing hysterically. Eventually, Mark said he'd just never thought to cut there to learn that third dimension of where things are placed."

Trying to find her own solutions to problems is also how Poss became a farrier in the first place. She began working on horse hooves for the simple reason that she wasn't happy with the last job her farrier had done.

"I just started trimming the feet myself until I could find a better farrier," said Poss. "And then I started finding information. My horses responded so well, and I realized I like doing this. My granddad had always made me take care of my own ponies' feet, so it's not like it was out of the normal for me. But I didn't expect it to be my career."



When it comes to veterinarians and farriers working together, Poss has seen members of both professions underestimate each other. For instance, veterinarians may fail to appreciate the expertise farriers develop by working in such a specialized field, or they may assume they know better because they have a doctorate. But Poss also recalled multiple discussions with a veterinarian friend of hers about farriers who refuse to try what she recommends.

“It’s a two-way street,” said Poss. “I’ve learned to trust the veterinarians and say to them, ‘Let’s figure this out together.’ The key component is showing respect both ways.”

And sometimes, what seems like defensiveness is actually fear.

“Once I had a vet insist that I do a procedure I felt was too invasive and too much in the realm of veterinary medicine,” said Poss. “Despite voicing my concerns and asking for help, she insisted that if I was a real professional, I could do it. I admit, that made me feel defensive and vulnerable. I wasn’t refusing to do as she suggested; I just needed help implementing her request. I feel we both exhibited defensive behaviors and didn’t work as a team.”

Poss explained that one of the biggest challenges for farriers and veterinarians is establishing clear communication so that when there is an objection or lack of understanding, they can figure out where the other person is coming from. Part of the reason events like the dissection clinic are important is because they foster the trust, respect, and shared knowledge needed to work effectively together.

Hoopes and the Utah Horseshoers Guild are working to ensure that more clinics where farriers and veterinarians can learn together are held at USU. And while the details of those future events are still being finalized, the continued importance of farriers’ skills remains certain.

“Historically speaking, all we had were farriers — people putting shoes on horses,” Hoopes said. “They were the doctors. It wasn’t until veterinary medicine came along that things changed. But when we look around today, farriers still see a given horse on a more routine basis, and they oftentimes know more about that horse than veterinarians. And we need to respect their knowledge and abilities as professionals.”

Editor’s Note: Please do not attempt to trim horse hooves without learning from an experienced farrier or other expert.