

VET DIARY



OUR EXPERT

Nicola Thompson is a qualified vet who works for Wright & Moreton in Cheshire, a member practice of XL Equine. She has ridden since she was a child.

A kick to the head

Our vet columnist Nicola Thompson attends to a pony who has suffered a nasty wound after being kicked

With summer here, and grass growing in the fields, there are lots of happy horses and ponies kicking up their heels.

One of my equine patients, a cheeky Shetland called Mr Pickles, sadly got in the way of his fieldmate doing just that.

A call came into the office on a Wednesday afternoon from a worried owner who said her pony had been kicked in the head and had a big wound – she said she could see his skull.

After having a quick chat with her on the phone, I went straight to the yard.

It was reassuring that she had described Mr Pickles as being bright and alert. Head injuries can result in trauma to the brain, and this would present as the animal being less responsive or behaving abnormally.

When I got to him, Mr Pickles' wound certainly looked rather dramatic and it was clearly painful. I checked his heart rate and sedated him to enable me to examine the damage properly.

Essential protection

Once he was calm, I could see there was a large flap of skin on the pony's forehead which extended over his left eye.

What I was most worried about was

damage to the skull underneath, which was exposed. Feeling around carefully I couldn't find any depressions or fracture lines.

The bone in a horse's skull is not as thick as you might think and the sinuses lie very close below. If he had fractured the bone, though, it would still have

had quite a long way to go before reaching sensitive structures such as the brain.

Mr Pickles was lucky as it appeared to be a glancing blow and the damage was superficial. After cleaning the area, clipping away the hair and injecting local anaesthetic around it, I used staples to close the wound.

I started him straight away on antibiotics and painkillers. Also, as he was a new pony to the yard and he wasn't up to date with his

Results from the fluid sample showed that the antibiotics he had been on were effective and fortunately Mr Pickles continued to improve.



Mr Pickles was kicked in the head by a fieldmate

“A large flap of skin extended over his eye and the skull was exposed”

tetanus vaccinations, I gave him a jab to provide immediate protection.

It is important horses are up to date with vaccinations as they can contract tetanus from any wound. I booked a revisit for four days' time to check on how he was doing and whether the wound was healing.

Infection sets in

All looked good on my second visit, but two days later, when he had finished his course of antibiotics, Mr Pickles' owner was concerned about a swelling underneath the skin flap.

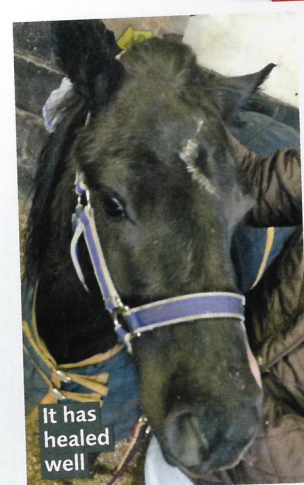
When I examined the pony, he had a pocket of fluid underneath the flap. I removed a couple of the staples and opened a drainage hole to let the fluid out – it contained pus, which meant there was an infection.

I restarted the antibiotics and took a sample of the fluid to check what bacteria were present, in case the antibiotics we were using would not be effective. Some bacteria can be resistant to antibiotics.

The next day, some more fluid drained out but the wound sealed again and the swelling under the flap did not recur.

I removed the staples two weeks after the swelling had resolved and it had healed well. Hopefully he won't even have a scar.

Overall, head wounds can be very dramatic, but often they heal remarkably well. Mr Pickles' healing was only delayed slightly by infection – I am happy with the end result.



It has healed well



Staples were used to close up the wound

Next issue: Foaling – and what challenges this can present – will be the subject of Nicola's column in next month's *Horse magazine*