

The Truth about Applied Equine Podiatry

The Naked Truth about Applied Equine Podiatry by Dr. Robyn Lord, DBA, MIAEP

For the more than twenty years, the popularity of barefoot horses has increased in volumes. The frustration of horse owners with traditional farrier sciences has also increased. Horse owners are looking for their own answers, answers to questions about balance and lifestyle, as well as how the hoof itself works and grows. Herein lays the problem. Up until now, there has been no true hoof model for farriers or veterinarians to follow. I don't view the practice of balancing the hoof to the lower limb and shoulder as a viable model. As a result horses have been suffering and developing syndromes, and diseases that may have been prevented, had the horse owner known what to look for.

Systematically, the barefoot craze has taken off. Often labeled as "designer trims" of the decade, these barefoot trim styles are offering an alternative to the traditional farrier practices. However, what are they based on? Most are based on the hoof of the wild horse and are concentrating on the exterior of the hoof. Some of these trims are extremely radical and are, my opinion considered damaging to the hoof. Many of these trims give only consideration to circulation and support overlooking true foot function. So what is the answer? This question explains the over abundance of internet sites and chat rooms that exist today, where thousands of people question the different trims and the results they produce. Why all the confusion? Simply this, there has been no precise model offered to support the greater majority of the hoof care industry. Not until now.

At the Institute of Applied Equine Podiatry, KC La Pierre has answered many of the questions surfacing on the internet, not all but, many.

KC has been a registered Journeymen farrier for over a quarter century. However, he was never satisfied with the traditional/conventional farrier sciences or the results he obtained in his own practice of that science. His theories and models for foot function help bridge the gap between the farrier sciences and the barefoot movement. What he teaches at his school, the International Institute of Applied Equine Podiatry, is how to define proper structure for the hoof and foot of the horse. Yes, these are two separate structures, the hoof and a foot. Most neurological and circulatory issues that plague our horses today are present due to imbalances between the hoof and foot. How the structures contact the ground is paramount to the soundness of the horse. KC is able to balance the foot using what he terms "the internal arch apparatus (foot) and its axis plane." The arch is not simply the coffin bone and whether it is ground or close to ground parallel. The internal arch apparatus includes the distal bones (P3, P2, and navicular bone), lateral cartilages/digital cushion, and all connective and sensitive structures within the hoof capsule. His HPT (High Performance Trim) Method is the tool he uses to achieve proper balance. He balances to four dimensions, and utilizes the fifth dimension of time (T) to achieve health and performance.

Many farriers' today balance to only two dimensions, proximal/distal and rotational balance, however they label proximal/distal balance as medial/lateral balance and anterior/posterior. The fact of the matter is that medial/lateral and anterior/posterior balance as viewed by these farriers is actually proximal/distal balance (up and down) of the medial/lateral and anterior/posterior planes. What about proprioception? Proprioception is the ability of the horse to know where its hooves are at all times, in relationship to its own body. Within the horse's foot there are five locations that have been identified where proprioception is heightened. Heel placement is a key element in allowing the horse the ability to know where its hooves are at all times and how to correctly execute the stride. Most horses we see today have under-run heels that are naturally contracted due to forward movement of the hoof capsule. The frog, having a triangular shape will naturally cause the heels to move in or contract as the foot print moves forward from under the horse.

KC La Pierre addresses the functions that are present within the foot and works to aid the horse in bringing back proper structure once it is lost due to incorrect stimulus. What does all of this information mean to the horse owner today? After all, it has caused one more barefoot trim to exist and it has raised yet more questions in peoples minds. However, please take the following fact into consideration; KC does not consider himself a barefooter. This somehow confuses people. How can you not put shoes on and not be a barefooter? Being in the barefoot sandbox has not been an ally to KC and his work. Currently, many barefooters are against the farriers and many farriers are up in arms about the barefooters. Why can't we all just agree to help the horse? Isn't that what it is all about? Applied Equine Podiatry being the study of the equine foot encompasses cutting edge research and proven results that aid the horse in healing itself, and perform as it was meant to perform.

Utilizing a spectrum of usability KC places the hoof onto a scale identifying the current health of each structure. Educating farriers, veterinarians and horse owners on proper structure, how to recognize it, and rehabilitate it is the practice of Whole Horse Hoof Care. Being an Applied Equine Podiatrist has nothing to do with barefoot foot per say, it has to do with creating the proper environment for the horse, allowing correct force to be the correct stimulus for growth. Once proper structure is returned you may elect to apply a shoe but, you do so with the knowledge that by locking the foot into such an environment you are no longer promoting proper foot function and could quite possibly dissipate the structures you stimulated to grow. Remember, most people shoe their horse to allow their horse to perform in a discipline, not for the health of the horse itself. KC has invented a viable replacement for the steel shoes. His design, Perfect Hoof Wear Pro 3D allows proper bio-mechanical and neurological function to occur. It does not however allow the hoof to wear naturally when applied; therefore it is imperative that a regular trim schedule be maintained. KC's Perfect Hoof Wear was originally designed for those working towards returning proper structure to the foot, but didn't have the necessary structures to work over extreme environments where rocks, rough ground, or asphalt may cause damage to the hoof capsule. The PHW Pro 3D replaces all types of performance and remedial type shoes.

In order to help the most horses, Applied Equine Podiatry needs to go main stream into the barefoot realm, farrier trade, and the veterinarian realm. KC La Pierre is working toward helping as many horses as possible in order to correct what he terms "DHS" (Deformed Hoof Syndrome). Being in the barefoot niche' will not enable KC to do so. Most people think that simply being barefoot is the responsible thing to do. However, often the environment that is present does not allow for the horse's ability to heal itself and problems often arise. KC has dedicated his work to educating people about the science of Applied Equine Podiatry. KC's theories have opened many doors for many veterinarians and farriers the world over. But there are many more doors that need to be opened before we start to see a significant change in what has become acceptable in the equine hoof care industry. Applied Equine Podiatry is truly the cutting edge alternative to the farrier sciences.

About the Author:

Dr. Robyn Lord is President and Co-Founder of the Institute of Applied Equine Podiatry. Receiving her Doctorate in Business from the University of South Florida, Tampa in 2018, Dr. Lord is committed to researching areas within the Equine Industry that would provide important data to the science of equine podiatry.

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