

Equine elective surgery becoming more popular

Virginia Tech is seeing an increased number of non-emergency equine surgeries.

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A greater number of owners are choosing to have elective, non-emergency surgeries performed on their horses, and Virginia Tech's Marion duPont Scott Equine Medical Center has noted the increase. The Center's five board certified surgeons completed almost 500 such treatments in 2006 as compared to only 400 similar operations one decade earlier—a 20 percent increase since 1996.

Dr. Nat White, the Jean Ellen Shehan professor and director at the Marion duPont Scott Equine Medical Center, says that clients now have a variety of options for addressing ailments and afflictions that, although not life-threatening, can inhibit their horse's performance or reduce the quality of the animal's life.

"Non-emergency conditions, such as bone chips and ligament injuries, can be treated more effectively than in the past," White says. "New technologies and techniques are allowing us to correct many of these abnormalities and return horses to full health."

Advancements in both diagnostic technology and clinical application have made it easier for surgeons to diagnose and correct equine maladies while new anesthetics and modern monitoring techniques make elective surgery safer with improved prognosis.

"We are discovering injuries that previously went unnoticed because we did not have the diagnostic capabilities that are available today, such as MRI," says Dr. Ken Sullins, professor of equine surgery at Marion duPont Scott Equine Medical Center. "New surgical tools, including lasers and scopes, are making these injuries much easier to detect and treat." Also adding to the appeal of elective surgeries is the expanded availability of minimally invasive surgical methods.

"Not only are the patients more comfortable, but these minimally invasive techniques cause considerably less damage to soft tissue and involve a shorter recuperation time," says Dr. Sarah Dukti, clinical assistant professor in emergency care and equine surgery at Marion duPont Scott Equine Medical Center. For more information about the Center, visit <http://emc.vetmed.vt.edu>.