To this end, a group of researchers worked together to develop a uniform system for classifying cases of contracted foal syndrome (CFS). According to Jana Caldwell, MS, a PhD candidate at the Texas A&M University College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Science, describing the process of developing this classification system, "We will never know for sure if these defects are related or are caused by independent factors until we can do more research, but it is clear that many cases have a biologic basis."

Moreover, she said, changes could be made as scientists make research advancements and develop a better understanding of different phenotypes. "If we know a genetic mutation is causing the same phenotype, then the foal's medical record should be updated to reflect the mutation."

Caldwell noted that the foals she reviewed included those with clinically obvious conditions, such as a flexural equinovarus deformity (deformity of the foot and ankle), and those with more subtle conditions, such as contractures and abdominal wall defects (herniations). "At the time, researchers had no uniform way to classify these foals, so we needed a system to help veterinarians build a bank of knowledge to help guide treatment down the most effective path."

Additionally, the research team suggested classifying disease severity by the numbers 1, 2, and 3 (with 1 being mild at 5 to 15 degrees, 2 being moderate at 15 to 30 degrees, and 3 being severe at more than 30 degrees), Caldwell said. Caldwell said this suggests a connection between these two structures and contractures and a possible shunt pathway during fetal development. "From medical records there was a relatively high incidence of these malformations occurring with flexion contractures and abdominal wall defects, Caldwell explained."

"CFS is unusual in that it can affect any number of limbs and severe cases might require euthanasia. Mildly affected foals can reach productive lives," she said. Caldwell noted that CFS can affect any number of limbs and severe cases might require euthanasia. Mildly affected foals can reach productive lives.

Originally published on CFS Classification System Developed (AAEP 2012) on April 21, 2013. Revised April 21, 2013.

By Erica Larson, News Editor