

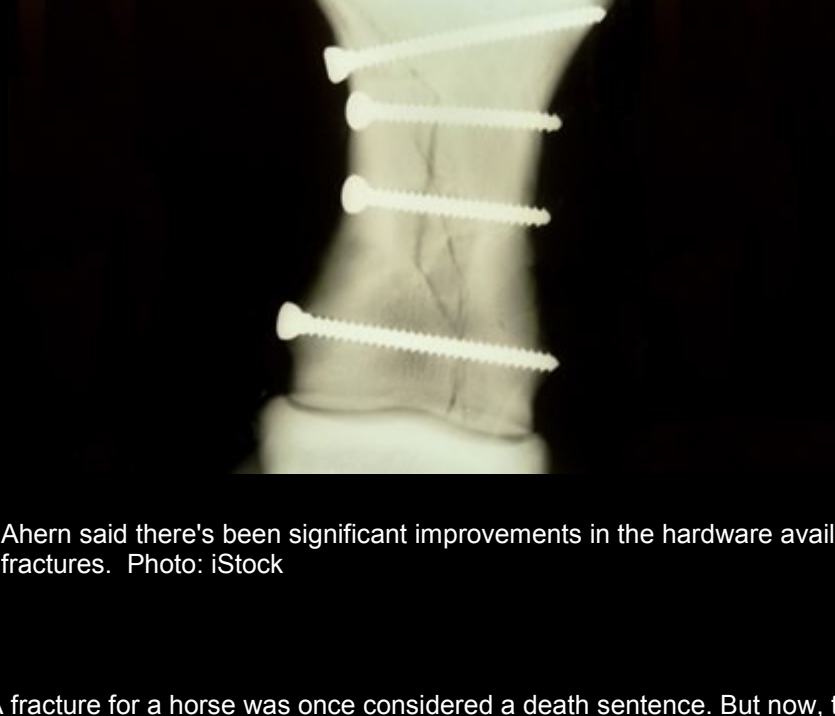


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Equine Fractures: What's Fixable?



Ahern said there's been significant improvements in the hardware available for repairing fractures. Photo: iStock

A fracture for a horse was once considered a death sentence. But now, thanks to advances in technology and improvements in surgical procedures, a horse's prospects have significantly improved a horse's chance of survival when faced with a broken bone.

At the Australian Veterinary Association Annual Conference, taking place May 22-27 in Adelaide, South Australia, equine surgeon Benjamin Ahern, BVSc, MACVSc, Dipl. ACVSMR, ACVS, will be speaking about new techniques used to treat equine fractures.

"Horses are large powerful creatures that can cause remarkable damage to themselves and this can make fracture repair and management difficult," he said. "However, over the past 20 to 30 years, we've made substantial progress in the way we treat and manage fractures. Owners who find themselves in the unfortunate position of having a horse with a fracture can now explore surgical options, giving the animal a greater chance of surviving the injury."

Ahern said there are several key developments that have greatly increased the odds of a horse's survival after sustaining a fracture.

"There has been remarkable progress in the development of techniques to repair some fractures standing up—so, without the need for general anesthesia," he said. "We've also seen significant improvements in hardware availability. In particular, locking compression plates (LCPs) have been a game changer because they effectively change how the repair occurs and are roughly four times stronger than the now out of date dynamic compression plates.

"Stability is paramount in any repair and LCPs with their improved strength translate to improved stability," he said.

Ahern also stressed the important role that post-surgery infections play in a horse being able to survive a fracture. He said that for equine surgeons, it's extremely disheartening to repair a fracture and then see an infection develop that results in the loss of the patient.

"Preventing a closed fracture from becoming open and minimally invasive repair techniques are hugely important to prevent infections and ensuring the horse's survival," he explained. "Implants now have coatings and structural changes to help prevent bacterial infections. These days we also see a better response to treatment thanks to our ability to deliver a high concentration of antibiotics to the fracture site as opposed to the whole body.

"The advances we've had in equine surgery combined with instant communication channels, including email and text messages, means it's extremely easy and essential to get an experienced opinion prior to simply euthanizing a horse with a fracture," Ahern concluded.

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