How do I treat this, and where do I start?

If you find your horse with a severe laceration on his leg and blood pooling on the stall floor, no doubt your heart will immediately skip a beat. As you regain your composure you might begin to wonder: How do I treat this, and where do I start?

Most lacerations' prognosis is good to excellent if caught and treated early, Southwood said. This can decrease, however, depending on the wound's severity, whether bony or soft tissue structures are involved, and whether a tendon, tendon sheath, or bone chip seems unlikely, it's better to confirm the internal structures are intact prior to debride (surgically remove the dead or damaged tissue and/or foreign material) the wound. "Do this before the horse gets worked up, if his vital signs are stable," she said, "and treating the wound. Southwood suggested veterinarians apply some sterile lubrication to the wound before clipping and preparing the area aseptically. She reminded practitioners to clean the hoof, if applicable, as these structures can carry a substantial amount of bacteria and foreign material that could contaminate the wound."

The next step will be to ensure maximum effect. This is where the veterinarian will have the best chance to evaluate, lavage (flush and clean), and explore the wound and palpate the leg in the early stages of managing the laceration, watch for lameness or gait abnormalities that could indicate damage to an internal structure. "Any wound on the limb, especially the distal (or lower) limb, may involve a joint, tendon, tendon sheath, or bone," she relayed. "Even small puncture wounds that appear insignificant can be life-threatening if a deeper structure is involved and becomes infected."

How to Manage Limb Lacerations in Horses

To that end, Louise Southwood, BVSc, PhD, Dipl. ACVS, ACVECC, reviewed the steps veterinarians should take in an emergency laceration situation at the 2015 World Equine Veterinary Association Congress, held Oct. 8-10 in Guadalajara, Mexico. Southwood is an Associate Professor of Emergency and Critical Care at the University of Pennsylvania's School of Veterinary Medicine. She draws from her expertise as a member of the Bolton Center, in Kennett Square, Pennsylvania, which is the premier equine trauma center in the United States.

Southwood counseled that horses, and can lose a lot of blood before they exhibit signs of shock, up to 8 to 10 liters, about 40 liters (10.5 gallons) for an average 500-pound (226-kilogram) horse. "Horses do have a lot of blood - an 800-pound (363-kilogram) horse can lose a substantial amount of blood and can lose a lot of blood before they exhibit signs of shock, up to 8 to 10 liters, about 40 liters (10.5 gallons) for an average 500-pound (226-kilogram) horse," she said. "Horses have a lot of blood which is why you will end up losing a lot of blood before they exhibit signs of shock, up to 8 to 10 liters, about 40 liters (10.5 gallons) for an average 500-pound (226-kilogram) horse."