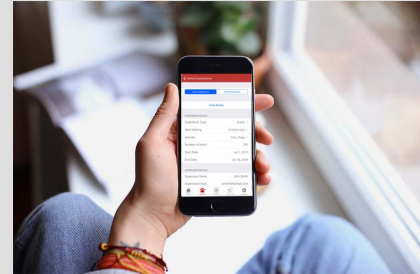




Admissions

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Sports Medicine-- Rooting for the Horses

by Caitlin Hayes

All across [Cornell University's](#) campus, students attend classes; staff and professors work in offices or labs. Meanwhile, at any given moment, on the northeast edge of campus, [Norm G. Ducharme, Clinical Sciences](#), may be performing surgery on a 1,200-pound, pedigreed sport horse. Or he may be watching a race horse run 40 miles per hour on a huge treadmill set in the floor of a hangar-like room. He may be scanning the latest international race and sporting results, to guess if his treatments have worked.

The horses Ducharme treats have diseases of the upper respiratory system, which are

surprisingly common and troublesome in horse athletes. "We basically do sports medicine for horses," he says. Ducharme and collaborators were able to make big strides in their research when, in the 1980s, they began studying and treating actual competitors (versus research horses), where the respiratory diseases naturally occurred. Trainers and owners have been bringing their horses to Cornell ever since.

As he treats some of the fastest, most agile and graceful competitors, Ducharme is also working to understand why these diseases occur, how to better diagnose them, and how improvements in treatment can restore the horses to health and competition.

Winning, Failure, Success

"We got our first [treadmill](#) in 1987," Ducharme says, "and were able to do a lot of studies as far as the physiological impact of an airway obstruction. By doing this with the horses where the disease occurred naturally, we realized that there were a lot of shades of the same disease." That complexity has required greater understanding of the diseases as well as a precision medicine approach. Different horses, depending on the stage of the disease, may require different treatments.

Treating horses that compete comes with some cost. It's difficult to track the results of the surgeries, as trainers don't want to subject their horses to unnecessary travel or tests post-treatment. While admitting that it's not full-proof, Ducharme and his team do look at how much money the horses make as a way to track the success of the surgeries.

"You can see that in 80 percent of the horses we operated on, the earning would go up, so it did cross some people's minds that we should put two dollars on any horse that comes here," Ducharme jokes. "That did sound like insider trading, so we didn't do that."

"I don't want to turn anyone away because that's our research, that is how we learn, that's how we're going to find out what's working."

Ducharme, who grew up around horses, says he follows the big horse races, but whether or not a horse he's treated earns money is not the biggest reward for him. "It's nice when you get a win picture, but the reward for us is not having as many failures. We hate failures," he says. "It used to be that a failed surgery would mean a horse that couldn't swallow or food and water coming out its nose, and as a surgeon, you think, what have I done? We're more motivated by 'we've got to be able to do a better job.' I'd like to treat them all like they're my own horse. You never settle."

A Smart and Caring Team of People

Ducharme jokes that he'd be living on the street if it wasn't for Cornell. "The brand is so important. It gives you credibility. If you're on the Cornell payroll, people assume there must have been some vetting process," he says. "And you are surrounded by very smart people!"

"You have the right mentors, the right colleagues working in different areas. We have all these people who really care, working together," he says. "You need all of it. You need to align basic medical research with the clinical population, and you need a performance testing clinic, which we have here. My part in this is very small."

Ducharme tells a story of how the Cornell Polo team even helped his group by bringing their horses in to establish baseline testing on the treadmill. "There really wasn't anything in it for them. It was more, we're all on the same team," he says. "Really, whatever things our group has achieved, we've achieved as a group within a great university."

Full article can be found in [CornellResearch](#)

Photo by Alexis A. Wenski-Roberts (CVM)

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Admissions Presentations & Tours On-Campus

- Friday, May 11, 2018; 3:00-5:00
- Friday, June 15, 2018; 2:00-4:00
- Friday, July 20, 2018; 2:00-4:00
- Friday, August 3, 2018; 2:00-4:00

Annual Open House

Saturday, April 7, 2018, 10:00-4:00

Admissions Presentations with Student Panel:

- 11:00-12:00
- 1:30-2:30



CORNELL ON THE ROAD

Sunday, March 4, 2018, 2:30-5:00
Grand Hyatt Washington, Washington, DC

[APVMA Symposium](#)

Friday, March 23, 2018
(all day)
Auburn University

[Cornell Veterinary Alumni Panel](#)

Stamford, CT area
Thursday, April 5, 2018
(evening)

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for details and how to register

[New York State FFA Convention](#)

Rochester, NY
Friday & Saturday, May 17 & 18, 2018

[National Association of Advisors for the Health Professions](#)

Saturday, June 30, 2018, 3:30-5:30
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