

Bodywork for Acute Equine Conditions — In the Moment

— By Susan Smith —

Recently I suffered a serious horse-related injury and was incapacitated for a period of time. In this time, I really needed a lot of bodywork: support-of-my-entire-being energetic work to address the pain and trauma that my body had gone through as a result of injury, being in the hospital, and subsequent physical rehab.

Passing through those various strange worlds with their attendant requirements — pain killers, anesthesia, procedures, strange food, etc. — made me realize how much trauma gets trapped in the body when dealing with these situations.

It is the same for our horses. When our horses injure themselves or suffer illness, not only is there the initial injury or illness to recover from, but there is recovery from the cure. We take them to the vet. They may stay there for a few days or weeks, hooked up to an IV and/or having surgery or having a leg bandaged. Then we bring them home. The effects of the drugs they were given, which were necessary to the situation, can remain in the system up to a month or two. It all depends on the condition of the patient and the types of anesthesia used. We don't know the level of pain they suffered. But the body remembers everything.

It was valuable for me to receive bodywork from the day after my injury. Then for the first week, someone frequently came to work on me, tapering off the next week, and so on, until I began to hold onto some of the work for longer periods. The bodywork supported several systems; it helped rid the body of pain, trauma, the emotional impact, and the effects of the drugs. And it allowed my body to be better resourced in general.

The Body Remembers. Often I see humans and horses with old trauma that has been there a long time. The initial injury has healed, but they are left with a scar, some residual pain or limited movement, or are compromised in an organic or immune way. People find that they have been jogging along and then suddenly realize that an injury they suffered ten years ago is bothering them again. It's causing problems elsewhere in the body or never got resolved, and they want to try to address it in a new way. Although this can be painful, it is also an opportunity to work with ways in which the body has compensated for the original injury and taken their system away from its healthy organization.

Work on the Scene. My recent experience reminded me how important it is to address an injury or illness right after it occurs, to add this vote of support to the body's natural healing process.

Four years ago, I was riding my mare Zuzka in the Pecos when she stepped into a deep bog complicated with tree roots. She fought to get her leg free. In so doing, she injured herself and came up lame. I worked on her leg and hindquarter right away, and she was able to travel down the mountain. I worked on her once we were back in camp and the next morning as well. She had consistent work until I could get a vet to examine her once we were home.

This old injury pattern is still with her, yet I can work on her now and her body remembers, holds the memory of

resource that it received right after the injury, and she recovers quite quickly. I believe that because she received work so promptly after the initial injury, her body knows how to self-correct more quickly than if she hadn't had that work.

I particularly noticed this recently after I had not been able to do bodywork on her for about eight weeks, in which time her old injury reared its head again. It's bound to do this: She is now 18 and suffers from some arthritis. I was able to go back to it, and it responded very quickly to the care.

How Often and How Much? My injury also raised the these question for me. I have a support system of colleagues who practice Ortho-Bionomy bodywork who could come and help me. But what can most people do in a crisis situation like this? How can they receive treatment that is frequent enough and affordable enough to make a difference?

My reply to these questions is three-fold:

- 1) How often a body needs treatment really depends on the individual and the severity of injury. In my case, I had suffered a severe injury and was extremely blessed by the frequency of visits from practitioners; the visits became less frequent as the healing progressed. It may not take as many visits for someone else. My experience also shows me that, to self-correct, horses generally don't require as many visits as people.
- 2) For those beings who have had this type of bodywork or other energetic work before, the body responds much faster. Ortho-Bionomy is like a language that the body learns or in some cases already knows. Once it has learned a few words, it doesn't take long for it to pick it up again. So for those beings that have received it before, if they become injured, the body immediately responds and says, oh yes, I know what you're saying, and can shift accordingly. Horses speak this language naturally. If you watch me work on horses, generally you'll see they make shifts in their bodies in response to the work that are quick and very clearly visible. They don't get intellectual about it, they don't know anything about placebos, they don't worry about whether they're getting their money's worth: They just respond to what feels right in their bodies.
- 3) I am also a firm believer in self-care, and being able to execute a few moves for yourself or your horse will help support the body between sessions or perhaps eliminate the need for a session at all. Ortho-Bionomy principles are powerful, gentle, and effective and characterized by going in the direction of ease, never against it. You can do what appears to be very little to effect a powerful change, what I call "tweaking."

Summary

There is also a level at which the bodywork "follows on," occurring on an organic or fluid level. I would guess this has something to do with speaking the language. Once the body gets in touch with the self-corrective reflex, then it is able to be more fully resourced and go there on its own. The greater resources also can translate to more overall health in the body, which can translate to fewer visits to the vet, less supplementation, and greater performance.

Susan Smith is a writer, endurance rider, and registered practitioner of Ortho-Bionomy for both humans and equines, living in Santa Fe with her husband, two grandchildren, and two Arabians.