**What Do You Do??**

When you find your horse with a wound or foreign body sticking out of them, the first thing is to call your vet.  The horse is probably not going to die in the next 2 or 3 hours unless a vital organ or major blood vessel is damaged.  If a foreign body is present your vet may encourage you to bring the horse into the clinic so x-rays, ultrasound, and surgery can take place right away.  Do not pull the foreign body out of the horse until you speak with the vet!

**What Does the Vet Do?**

The vet will examine the wound closely and try and determine what structures might be damaged.  They will clean the area and flush out debris.  It may be necessary to take x-rays or ultrasound the affected areas to see if any foreign material is still in the horse or if any bones have been fractured.  Sometimes contrast material will be injected into the wound to better visualize it’s tract.  Again, many of these wounds are deep, which means that fluid and inflammatory material can built up in the pocket of the wound.  This buildup can delay healing and promote infection.  To effectively get the fluid out of the wound your vet may place a drain around the wound.  You probably will have to work the drain back and forth and flush out the drainage sites daily.  Sometimes your vet will stitch up most of the wound but leave a couple of gaps for drainage, other times the wound will be left open.  Almost all horses will get antibiotics and anti-inflammatories, and any horse with a wound should be up to date on their tetanus shot.

Some of these large and deep wounds will take a LONG time to heal.  The time to heal depends of several things: 1) infection, 2) inflammation, 3) foreign material, 4) size of wound.  Sometimes the foreign material goes undetected, especially if it does not show up on x-rays or ultrasound.  This can cause a constant source of infection and inflammation and will prolong the healing until the foreign material is removed.  A common sign of foreign material is when the wound heals up when the horse is on antibiotics, but as soon as they stop taking the meds the wound begins draining again.  Eventually the body will end up attacking the foreign material until it is “pushed” outwards.

If the wound is particularly large an unable to be stitched, you may have to deal with an open wound for quite some time.  You may be instructed to lavage the wound, hose it, apply topical treatments, and more for months on end.  This can be frustrating for owners and lead to the horse resenting people.  It is best to attempt to treat the horse in a safe area.  If applicable, you can give your horse some grain or treats while you apply medication or lavage the wound.  If you keep calm and the horse realizes that the treatment doesn’t hurt, they will get used to it.