**Observation and Physical Examination**

**Observation from a Distance**

1. The general examination will begin with observation of the horse from a distance to

detect abnormalities. Both the horse’s stance and general behavior should be observed at

this time.

2. A body condition score can be determined during this time in addition to a normal

respiratory rate prior to handling the animal.

**Physical Examination**

**Examination of the Head and Neck**

1. Examine the mucous membranes by raising the upper lip. Evaluate for moistness, icterus,

hyperemia, cyanosis, pallor, ulceration and petechial. Capillary refill time is evaluated by

blanching the mucous membrane.

2. Evaluate the nares for symmetry and airflow.

3. Percuss the maxillary and frontal sinuses.

4. The tongue can be isolated through the interdental space to evaluate for oral ulceration.

The normal movement of the tongue should be noted.

5. The sclera should be evaluated by placing the thumb over the upper lid and grasping the

bottom of the bottom of the halter. The cornea should be evaluated. Elicit a menace

response by bringing your hand close to both eyes, a normal blinking response should

occur. Pupillary light reflexes can be evaluated with the use of the penlight.

6. The ears can be gently palpated for temperature and if there are suspicions of

cardiovascular shock or poor peripheral perfusion.

7. The intramandibular space can be palpated for submandibular lymphadenopathy.

8. In normal horses the retropharyngeal lymph nodes are not readily palpated. Assess this

area under the mandible for any noticeable swelling.

9. The facial artery can be palpated at the ventral aspect of the mandible and a pulse can be

felt.

10. The thyroid gland can be palpated in older horses. The left jugular vein can be occluded

and assessed for jugular fill.

**Rectal temperature:** Stand on the lateral side of the rear limb, lift the tail with one

hand and advance the thermometer (lubricated) with the other.

**Pulse rate** - pulse rate should be counted for at least 30 seconds. Normal pulse rate is

28-40 per minute. Location of easily palpable external arteries include the following:

a. Facial artery - most frequent – overlying the ventral border of the ramus of the

mandible

b. Transverse facial artery - ventral to the facial crest.

c. Digital artery – over the palmar/plantar and lateral or medial aspects of the

fetlock or pastern

**Thoracic Auscultation**

1. Lung auscultation

i. Compare lung sounds in the ventral, dorsal and middle thorax. A comparison of

the left vs. the right side of the thorax should be completed.

ii. A rebreathing bag can be utilized to better assess the lungs. The bag should be

held away from the nose so that it does not block the nostrils and inhibit

inspiration. Be sure to note how the horse tolerates this procedure and if any

coughing can be elicited. Also note how quickly the animal is able to recover after

the cessation of the procedure.

1. The thorax must be listened to while the rebreathing bag is in place. Deep

breathing can reveal abnormal lung sounds. Normal inspiratory sounds are

louder in comparison to expiratory sounds.

2. Cardiac auscultation

i. The heart can be auscultated on the left cranial ventral thorax assessing the

pulmonic, aortic and mitral valves. The heart rate can be determined at this time.

The right cranial ventral thorax can be ausculted to assess the tricuspid valve.

**Examination of Ventral Thorax and Abdomen**

1. Assess the animal the ventral thorax and abdomen for any ventral edema by placing

upward pressure on the ventral thorax on midline.

2. The abdomen should be ausculted for borborygmus. This can be done by placing the

stethoscope to the left and right paralumbar fossa and ventrally.

**Musculoskeletal Examination**

1. The forelimbs and hindlimbs should be evaluated for any signs of swelling heat or pain.

The joints should also be evaluated for swelling, heat and fluid.

2. All four limbs should be evaluated for digital pulses.

3. Overall musculature of the horse should be evaluated for symmetry.

i. Palpation can be done to confirm and detect muscle atrophy.