

**Equine Insurance – A Highly Recommended Policy!**

One of the biggest differences between human health care and animal health care is that for humans, many of us are covered by health insurance. Under most policies, annual physicals and immunizations are covered completely, and many other services, including emergency care, are covered after a deductible has been satisfied. In the case of our equine friends, we often have to make difficult choices about preventive care, diagnostics and treatment because of financial constraints. And, if one of our equine friends unexpectedly dies, we are often left with no horse and no money to replace it.

Many horse owners are unaware that insurance exists for horses. Even more commonly, horse owners think insurance is only for expensive show horses. But even our pleasure and trail horses can benefit from being insured. Equine insurance works a little bit differently than human insurance, but it can mean the difference between choosing life-saving treatment and euthanasia.

Several types of equine insurance exist. The most common is **mortality insurance**, which only applies if your horse dies or must be euthanized. (In many cases theft is also included in mortality insurance.) You receive the amount your horse was insured for. This works a bit like car insurance: A Ferrari is more expensive to insure than a Ford Focus, so with horses, a Grand Prix-level show jumper is more expensive to insure than a pleasure horse, because the replacement cost is higher for the show jumper. You request the amount you'd like your horse to be insured for. In most cases, there is a minimum, and for large amounts, you must justify your request by providing a competition or breeding record. In all cases, to acquire additional insurance, you must purchase mortality insurance on your horse.

The second-most common insurance is **major medical**. This typically covers up to a certain amount of care for major illness, lameness, diagnostics and surgery. Typical uses of major medical insurance include colic diagnosis, treatment and surgery; extensive lameness diagnostics such as multiple radiographs or MRI; and treatment of infectious disease such as Strangles or Potomac Horse Fever. In some cases, you might just want to insure your horse for surgery. Some companies allow you to purchase a **surgical endorsement** in addition to your mortality insurance. This endorsement would cover colic or other major surgery, but not medical treatment or lameness workups. It is important to note that some treatments, such as joint injections, are usually NOT covered by major medical insurance.

The least-common type of insurance we see in our practice is **loss of use**. This insurance is for horses that are no longer usable for their intended purpose but do not need to be euthanized. Horses that participate in some sports, such as racing and eventing, are often not eligible for this insurance. A good example of this was the case of Cigar, the second-richest thoroughbred stallion in the history of racing. He was unable to get any mares in foal, and his owners had insured him for loss of use as a breeding stallion. In that case, the owners got a significant sum of money from the insurance company. Unfortunately, the drawback is that the insurance company got to keep the horse! Luckily for Cigar, he lives a happy, easy life at the Kentucky Horse Park. But it is a major consideration when thinking about this type of insurance. It is also the most expensive type of insurance to purchase.

Unlike human medical insurance, equine insurance operates on a reimbursement basis. In other words, you pay for care up-front and are reimbursed after the fact. In cases of colic or other surgery, you must alert the insurance company prior to the surgery being performed. When you have insurance on your horse, you must also consider under what circumstances you want to submit a claim. If your horse has a minor lameness or mild colic that can be resolved fairly cheaply, you might not want to claim it immediately, as insurance companies can put exclusions on your policy (similar to "pre-existing conditions" in human insurance, or not submitting a fender-bender claim to your auto insurance because you'd rather pay the repair cost yourself than have your rates go up!). Check with your insurance company about how they determine what exclusions will apply to your horse under different circumstances. Having insurance has made all the difference in some of our patients' lives. Even if you only have backyard pleasure horses, our clinic recommends insuring eligible patients because of the benefit we've seen. Below are some local insurance agencies to consider when researching the best insurance for your horse. And as always, feel free to call us and speak with one of the equine veterinarians if you have any questions or concerns!

Windridge Ltd. (Jane Flanders et al) – www.windridgeltd.com; (763) 557-0709

McNamara Company (Debbie Treadwell) - www.buyhorseinsurance.com; (651) 426-0607

Lawrence Equine Agency (John & Debbie Lawrence) – lawrenceequineinsurance.com; (651) 388-8431

-Jennifer Selvig, DVM