

Inadequate mare-foal bonding restored by adoption of her own foal

Difficulties in mare-foal bonding are mostly the consequence of an abnormal maternal behaviour. Despite current therapies usually based on restrain and sedation of the mare as well as adapted management of each situation, the mare-foal bonding is not always created. However, adoption of foster foals and establishment of the maternal behaviour is often successful. Procedures of adoption mimic the transient increase of oxytocin during delivery and its effects by cervical and vaginal stimulation (Fergusson reflex), or by pharmacological simulation of the high concentrations of prostaglandins observed during parturition. Even if the mechanism is not yet well understood in mares, both hormones seem to have a direct effect on the brain control of maternal behaviour.

A primiparous 7 years old mare was presented at the Equine Clinic showing aggressive behaviour towards her 4 days filly especially when the foal attempted to suckle. No evident cause of pain at suckling was found.

A hormonal adoption procedure of her own foal was implemented after several attempts to restore the mare-foal bonding by restrain and sedation of the mare.

After 3h of fasting and isolation of the foal, the mare received an im injection of 750µg of cloprostenol. The foal was carefully presented to the mare when the secondary effects of the prostaglandins were visible. The mare accepted the foal and allowed suckling rapidly. During the next 24 hours under supervision, the mare showed a very normal maternal behaviour. After 3 days of normal bonding, mare and foal were discharged from the clinic.

Adoption of filial foals could be a valuable option in the treatment to establish or restore the normal bonding between a mare and her own foal.