



WOODROW'S STORY – What Else Could Happen to a Foal?

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A 6-year-old maiden mare foaled out unattended 25 days prematurely on a cold February night. The colt was found early the next morning lying in a snow bank with the mare standing nearby. The farm manager wrapped the foal in a blanket, put him in the back seat of an SUV along with his kids and headed to the clinic. Since a truck and trailer were not readily available, the mare was left at the ranch in order to save time.

At presentation, the foal was hypothermic (94.6°F), dehydrated, shocky, and had a very weak suckle response. Initial treatment consisted of warmed intravenous fluids, plasma, antibiotics, and navel disinfection, as well as nursing care (circulating warm water pad, overhead heat lamp, blankets and plenty of attentive students). After a couple of hours, the foal became more responsive to his environment and to stimulation. A nasogastric tube was passed and frozen-thawed colostrum was administered through the tube directly into his stomach. Milk replacer was fed by a bottle every 1 to 2 hours once the foal could stand and suckle.

A blood sample collected the following morning revealed an antibody (IgG) concentration of 458 mg/dl, which was just above the level considered to be marginally adequate for immune protection (400 mg/dl), but not up to the desired value (≥ 800 mg/dl).

Due to his rough start in life and the continued risk of infection, a second liter of plasma was administered to the colt, now nicknamed 'Woodrow' by the farm manager's children. Evaluation of a follow-up blood sample the next day indicated that his antibody level had increased to 764 mg/dl.

In the meantime, a trailer had been located and the mare was transported to the clinic to be with her foal. Unfortunately, she had no interest in little Woodrow and each attempt to reunite the pair met with increased aggression on the part of the mare. Restraint and sedation of the mare were all unsuccessful. After two frustrating days, the mare was judged to be too aggressive and all attempts to rejoin the pair were abandoned.

Fortunately, Woodrow took to suckling milk replacer from a bottle quite quickly. He was subsequently introduced to a lamb feeder at 3 days of age, eliminating the need for a bottle. We still wanted him to have an equine 'mom', but no nurse mares were available in the region. Consequently, we chose a mare that had given birth the previous year, with a history of being a good mother, and successfully stimulated her to come into milk with a combination of hormone treatments administered over several days. Manual milking was incorporated to increase stimulation for milk

production. The mare was housed in the stall next to Woodrow as the daily ‘lactation therapy’ was continued.

Woodrow was eventually introduced to his surrogate mom and a bond developed almost instantly. Her maternal instincts took over and she allowed the orphan colt to nurse unimpeded. Supplementation with milk replacer continued for several weeks until the nurse mare began lactating adequately. Our star pupil had moved from a tube, to a bottle, to a bucket, and now to a real mare.

Radiographs taken of Woodrow’s knees and hocks at 4 days of age revealed incomplete ossification of the bones of those joints, probably secondary to his premature birth. He was fitted with a set of splints and his exercise was temporarily restricted to protect his joints. The colt wore the splints intermittently for almost 3 weeks. He could still move around the 12 ft. by 24 ft. stall, and would lie down and stand up with ease.

We thought we were beyond the major risk period, but at 12 days of age his umbilical stump, which had been dipped with disinfectant multiple times, began to increase in size and urine was noted to dribble out the end. Woodrow had developed a patent urachus and an umbilical infection. Medical therapy was unsuccessful, and surgery was performed at 18 days of age to remove the affected umbilical stump.

Woodrow was finally discharged from the clinic along with his adopted mom at 30 days of age. Thanks to an attentive staff, a small army of students, and a compassionate owner, Woodrow now roams a 40-acre pasture outside of Fort Collins, Colorado.



Woodrow on arrival



Suckling from a bottle (day 1)



Woodrow suckling from a lamb feeder



Introduction to his new surrogate mom



Suckling from his new mom