

**RIDE THE WAVE...Equestrians using Veterinary Cold Laser Therapy for training, rehabilitation, and preparation for national competition.**

**Interview with Jill Todd, DVM, CVA, CVCP**

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The Helen Keller quote "alone we can do so little, together we can do so much" certainly applies when one looks at the team of professionals that it takes a horse and rider team to compete at a national level. Recently, Molly Martin of Redmond Washington, and her 7 year old Hanoverian Gelding Liberty LHF, was one of only 17 riders invited in the nation to compete at the USEF National Developing PSG Young Horse Championships in Lexington Kentucky. Her journey has been a remarkable one, and the health of her partner, Liberty LHF, has always been of utmost priority. Recently, the preparation for the strenuous journey, and competition itself has been priority number one for Liberty's care. In order to meet the goal of decreasing shipping stress and increasing Liberty's physical and emotional preparation for the competition, Molly connected with recent Texas transplant Jill Todd, DVM. Dr. Todd practices Veterinary Cold Laser Therapy combined with acupuncture and veterinary orthopedic manipulation to treat her equine patients.

Cold Laser Therapy has been used consistently and successfully with human athletes for many years. It has become a mainstay in professional sports where fast healing is not just desirable but necessary to remain competitive. Jeff Spencer, DC, a team Chiropractor for Lance Armstrong and the Discovery Channel Cycling Team, performs laser treatments on the cyclists before and after every ride on the Tour de France. He is adamant that laser is an integral part of his treatment protocol and he won't leave home without it.

Veterinary Cold Laser Therapy, or VCLT, has more recently entered the veterinarian world as a viable therapy. The technique was developed by William L. Inman DVM, and has been shown to help in treating arthritis pain, accelerating wound healing, and reducing acute tissue inflammation. Its prospects for equestrian sports and rehabilitation are remarkable, states Dr. Jill Todd. She feels these modalities in conjunction with traditional veterinary care are an integral part of training the equine athlete. By using an eastern/ western approach and high technology instrumentation, Dr. Todd's methodology for maintenance and treatment is state of the art.

Dr. Todd explains that VCLT involves the use of cold laser therapy at a specific frequency to stimulate healing. Light Amplification by Stimulated Emission Rays or LASER, is a highly concentrated coherent light which can be altered to attain many different outcomes. It is a natural and biological therapy that uses light to restore health to ailing cells. Cold Laser Therapy uses light at a concise wavelength directed at muscles, tissues, organs, connective tissue, the blood, and the living matrix of the body to stimulate healing at the cellular tissue level. VCLT uses a wavelength different than other lasers that are used for hair removal, surgical and other therapeutic instruments, making it a very specialized modality.

The technology of laser therapy integrates biology and quantum mechanics. In layman terms, the cold laser is a bio-modulator that will up-regulate or down-regulate the targeted area of the body by the use of coherent light at precise wavelength. The laser light communicates to the cells stimulating them to heal themselves, grow, change, and survive.

Cold laser beams are often directed at the local area of injury, spine, brain, or meridian for 5-60 minutes. The number of sessions varies depending upon the severity and chronic nature of the disease process. Other variables that determine session number include the age and general health of the horse as well as performance goals and nutrition level. The beams are red in color, and some lasers have multiple beams programmed at specific frequencies to target the area of involvement, effected nerve root, lymph node drainage, brain, or other organs. The treatment allows for focus on the injury while also stimulating the brain. This allows for not only healing, but also neurological re-organization and reorientation at the brain level.

There are many types of cold lasers on the market, Dr. Todd utilizes the Erchonia PL5 laser. Dr. Todd believes that the PL5 Erchonia Cold Laser to be "state of the art" and is delighted to offer it in western Washington. This particular laser shows superior results that have been tested and retested to find efficacy that other lasers do not appear be able to produce, states Dr. Todd.

Animals that are treated with VCLT usually have no side effects. Most horses tend to react to VCLT just as they do with massage therapy or Roling. After the light penetrates the skin they may get relaxed, drop their lips, head, or salivate. Other physiologic effects include hiccups, relaxation of sphincters, or dropping of the penis. Many horses show immediate gratification due to relief of pain, and will stretch and shake to show they are pleased.

Specific equine diseases that VCLT treats are: Arthritis (general or focal, i.e. sore back), Bleeders (Exercise induced naso-pharyngeal hemorrhage), Bone injury, Bronchitis and lung disease, Bruising (wounds), Bursitis, Colic, Dermatitis, Ear and Guttural pouch disease, Edema, EPM (and other Neurotropic disease i.e. herpes), Facial nerve paralysis, fears (terrors, emotions, training problems), Hepatitis, Hock distention, Heart conditions, Inflammation, Lacerations, Lack of Focus in Training, Laminitis, Laryngeal Hemiplegia, Ligament strains (suspensory desmitis) Kidney disease, Malignant hyperthermia, Navicular disease, Proud flesh (Excessive granulation tissue) Sepsis, and Tendon bows and strains. Other disease can be treated by extrapolating data from human studies.

The application of VCLT on Liberty, illustrates the immediate benefit of such therapy. After discussing Liberty's history of stifle surgery, splint bone fracture, acute hock swelling, back soreness and lack of focus during competition, Dr. Todd developed a treatment protocol using the VCLT. Dr. Todd worked closely with Molly's team, Steve Latimer, DVM, and Mike McCaffrey, LMP, LAMP, as they prepared Liberty for the strenuous journey to the USEF Developing PSG Young Horse Championship. Like many equine athletes, regardless of their quality of care, Liberty has injuries and inflammation in many legs and many joints. Because the goal is to get Liberty into the best performance condition possible a series of three treatments were scheduled over the period of one week prior to Liberty being shipped to

Kentucky. Again, the goal of providing decreasing shipping stress and increasing both the physical and emotional preparation for Liberty remained the focus of his treatments.

The first of three treatments Dr. Todd focused on Liberty's hock swelling, both hind legs including stifles, hocks, fetlocks, and back pain. She used a diagnostic acupuncture exam and VOM activator to diagnose Liberty's most painful areas. The activator was used first then acupuncture needles were inserted followed by the cold laser. One of the unique things about the Erchonia laser instrument is that it has multiple beams so it allows for multiple joints and soft tissue to be treated simultaneously. This enables Dr. Todd to treat more areas in less time, and will also heal areas that may not currently be showing any problems.

Following the first treatment Molly was ecstatic. The swelling on the right hock had decreased by sixty percent, and the firmness had decreased by close to fifty percent. Molly also stated that Liberty's suppleness through his back and neck had been increased tremendously.

The second treatment was similar to the first, but focused more specifically on Liberty's stifles, hocks, back, neck. Additionally, Dr. Todd also hoped to address Liberty's concentration and separation anxiety during competition. After the second treatment, Molly stated that she had the best ride on Liberty that she has ever had. Specifically, "his pirouettes felt more solid and he was more willing to keep his hocks underneath him and stay there." Liberty's tempi changes also seemed easier and with more power.

The third treatment was scheduled the day before the Liberty got on the truck to Kentucky. Dr. Todd's main emphasis was to continue treating the hocks, stifles, back, neck, and address concentration and separation anxiety issues. She also wished to stimulate his immune system for the long ride across the country. Palpation revealed that Liberty's back was 60 to 70 percent softer and more flexible than Dr. Todd had palpated at first treatment. The hock swelling was also softer and more yielding. After the last cold laser therapy, Dr. Todd performed some stretching exercises then turned him out to play in pasture.

Molly was thrilled at the results after the third and final treatment. She noticed a remarkable difference in his concentration and separation anxiety. Typically when Liberty is turned out, he calls and panics when any of his pasture mates leave. Shortly after the last treatment, Liberty only lifted his mid neck a little as his pasture mates left and continued a soft, relaxed walk without calling to his friends. For a horse with significant separation anxiety, this change in behavior showed huge progress. Additionally, on the last ride before leaving and after the last treatment, Molly stated that she felt Liberty's top line was longer and more relaxed. Prior to treatment, it was typical for Liberty to get short in the back and croup high. Post treatment, Liberty "finally feels like a horse that is even. His canter pirouettes have always felt very green, but now he feels like a trained dressage horse."

Overall the response to Liberty's three Cold Laser Treatments has been magnificent. His multiple limb and back soreness have been corrected as well as significant changes in behavior. Molly now has a horse in excellent condition both mentally and physically to compete at the national level. Molly has been so impressed with the results, that she has committed to a regular maintenance schedule when

she returns from Kentucky. Molly is hopeful that continued cold laser treatments will continue to keep Liberty's body and mind in exceptional condition.

Monthly wellness treatments are recommended by Dr. Todd for all equine athletes. "We ask a lot of our equine partners, regardless of if we ride dressage, jumping, eventing, rodeo, or racing. Providing maintenance helps to keep your partners happy and healthy, it's the least we can do" states Dr. Todd.

Jill Todd, DVM has a mobile equine integrative complimentary medicine practice based out of Bellevue Washington serving the western Washington area. She has recently relocated from San Marcos, Texas where she sold her general practice to move to the Pacific Northwest to be closer to her family. She is a rider, and achieved a B rating in Pony Club on the east coast, as well as competing in hunter/jumper and equitation over fences in the east coast and Texas. She was the faculty advisor for the Texas State University Rodeo team, and veterinarian for the Hays County search and rescue canine unit. This riding knowledge and background make communicating on a riding and performing basis easier and quite fun. Dr. Todd is also a certified veterinary acupuncturist (CVA), and a certified veterinary chiropractor (CVCP). Her main tools are the Erchonia PL5 cold laser, VOM activator, and acupuncture needles. Natural healing and wellness maintenance are keys to integrating complimentary medicine and traditional medicine. She feels that the use of these tools, and other alternative medicine techniques along with her horsemanship knowledge make her unique in the veterinary medical field.

If you have any questions concerning the use of these modalities or wish to contact Dr. Todd you can email her at [JillToddDVM@gmail.com](mailto:JillToddDVM@gmail.com).