

Advanced Equine Reproduction Course

by

Kim Jones and William B. Ley

Cryptorchidism is one of the most common disorders of sexual differentiation in the stallion. The horse may be a unilateral or bilateral inguinal cryptorchid. In the condition of retained testicles there are many factors to consider. Firstly, there is a belief that this condition may be genetic so there is an ethical question as to whether it should be 'fixed' or not. Secondly, in the case of a unilateral cryptorchid, if the descended testicle is removed and the retained one remains in the abdomen, then it could give someone the option of selling the horse as a gelding. Thirdly, in many instances, the retained testicle(s) are aspermic because of the increased body temperature and may not be functional for breeding.

If owners express an interest in medical or surgical therapy to help 'descend' a retained testicle, I would first inform them that the use of a unilateral cryptorchid stallion for breeding is discouraged because of the potential for him to pass this trait on to his offspring. If the owner(s) would like to approach medical therapy to help the testicle to descend, the best option would be exogenous administration human chorionic gonadotropin (hCG). It has been suggested that cryptorchidism may result from the inability of the gubernaculum testis to regress completely and male hormones can produce structural changes in the gubernaculum. However, it is not certain how much the neonatal or pre-pubertal gubernaculum can respond to exogenous hormone stimulation. Exogenous administration of testosterone to mature stallions has resulted in decreased testicular size and reduced sperm production and motility.

As for surgical correction for the undescended the testicle, castration is the surgery of choice. Inguinal testicles are usually easily retrieved in a normal surgical castration approach. Unfortunately, this surgical decision usually comes down to an ethical issue. There are not any approved methods of surgically 'descending' an equine testicle. It would be unethical to fix this problem. Thus if surgery were the option, the surgery being performed should be a bilateral castration.