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Pelvic Splitting in the Bovine

Ronald Hamm, Doug Hammill, and Frank Pisarik*

During the last meeting of the Western Montana Veterinary Medical Association, Doctor Patrick Hatfield from Victor, Montana, demonstrated a method for splitting the pelvic symphysis in the bovine.

He recommends this technique as an alternative to C-sections for dystocia involving large calves. After separating the symphysis he is able to pull these calves with a head snare and leg chains. The symphysis may spread up to three or four inches as the calf is pulled.

He lists these advantages:
1. Minimum restraint is required. A fence post and halter will suffice.
2. Much faster than a C-section
3. Can be done on standing or recumbent animals
4. A minimum of preparation and instruments are required
5. Requires less skilled help
6. You do not enter the peritoneal cavity. This reduces the incidence of peritonitis and shock.
7. It is safer for animals that are poor surgical risks

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Surgery

Epidural anesthesia is used. The ischial arch is palpated externally and the skin is incised vertically over the arch for about two inches. In multiparous animals this may be in the ventral commissure of the vulva. One hand is placed in the rectum to guide the chisel on its course and keep it properly set. The chisel is inserted into the incision and is placed on the pelvic symphysis. An assistant then drives the chisel with a hammer or mallet as it is guided through the entire length of the cartilaginous symphysis. If no help is available the chisel may be pushed through the cartilage in a series of quick thrusts. The separation is easily tested by twisting the chisel in its track about forty-five degrees while palpating the symphysis internally. The calf is then pulled with a head snare and foot chains. Skin sutures are not usually needed unless hemorrhage is excessive.

Doctor Hatfield has performed this operation on over one-hundred animals and has observed no locomotor problems postoperatively. The animals on which he demonstrated this technique showed no indi-
cation of such complications. He reports that those animals he has examined six months post-operatively have all been essentially normal. Some roughening of the symphysis may occur during healing and evidence of minor exostosis or malalignment may be found in a few animals.

Doctor Hatfield had his chisel made. He used a one-half inch stainless steel bar about two foot long with a perpendicular handle, a flared butt, and a butterfly shaped head.

Suggestions
1. Pick your cases. This technique will not replace C-sections in many types of dystocia.
2. Mature animals eventually replace the cartilage of the symphysis with bone. Restrict your attempts to younger animals.

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