

# Extraordinary Times: Extraordinary Efforts

Excerpts from an interview with Doug Thal DVM DABVP, creator of Horse Side Vet Guide®, a mobile app & web-based equine health resource for horse owners. - Originally published in MWI Messenger 12/14

## One Veterinarian's Educational Agenda Goes Mobile & Global

In March 2011, equine veterinarian Doug Thal DVM DABVP sat down to plan his practice's spring client workshops. "Honestly, I was pretty discouraged. I had been writing articles and hosting workshops and seminars for my clientele for years. Attendees always told me they loved those workshops, but it seemed like attendance just kept shrinking. And most people that did show up were familiar faces - the same small pool of loyal and informed clients. I was preaching to the choir."

"After over 20 years in equine practice, I expected my clientele to value my experience and wisdom and hold my professional opinion in higher regard. Instead, it seemed like I was just competing more and more with the advice of Dr. Google and Facebook 'friends' who were telling my clients how to manage their horse's health. It was, and remains, profoundly frustrating especially when there is no examination and no diagnosis, so proper treatment for the horse is delayed or withheld altogether."

About that time, Thal bought his first smartphone and the idea underlying the mobile application Horse Side Vet Guide (HSVG) was conceived.

"These days, almost everyone has a smartphone on them at all times," says Thal. "We all know that the web is packed with horse health information, but much of it misinforms and directly or indirectly drives clients away from veterinary services. It occurred to me that there might be a way to educate horse owners with a smartphone application that provides reliable and useful equine health information 'horse-side' – literally while standing in a stall and looking at their horse."

After three years of intense effort, and a steep and sometimes painful learning curve in software development, the mobile app was launched. According to Thal, "HSVG is designed to help caretakers of horses, mules and donkeys make better health-care decisions for their equines. Unlike many other equine-health sources, HSVG provides information that is founded upon the Veterinary-Client-Patient Relationship."

Importantly, HSVG is observation-based, meaning that it all starts with what a horse owner actually notices, not what they assume or guess is wrong.

"It's about making horse people the best observers they can be, and then guiding them as to how to work with their vet to make the right decisions for their horses. The list of almost 700 horse owner



observations is pretty unique – there is nothing like it elsewhere that I know of. It is the result of all my professional experience helping horses and horse owners while practicing equine veterinary medicine for over two decades. And I keep adding to it.” says Thal.

The app is powered by an extensive and constantly-growing knowledge-base of everything from common conditions to rare diseases, horse owner skills, how-to videos, veterinary diagnostics, diagnoses, treatments and more, all related to one another in a lifelike way.

Thal structured HSVG to be inclusive of quality equine health resources. “This effort is not limited to me and my knowledge. HSVG contains over 1200 Outside Resources - what I consider to be credible educational web-based resources for horse owners.”

Likewise, Thal sees HSVG as a collaborative effort and welcomes specialists in veterinary medicine to contribute. “We have assembled a top-notch advisory board of well-respected veterinarians from academia and private practice and we hope to broaden this community as HSVG grows.”

Thal states that HSVG is intended to encourage higher quality communication between horse caretakers and their veterinarians, and to showcase the complex thought process vets use in diagnosing and treating equine health issues.

“I thought very deeply about how to structure HSVG in order to strengthen the VCPR and retrain horse owners to think logically and critically about equine health issues. In almost every case, it sends them back to their local vet for more information and assistance.”

Part of the HSVG system is actually training clients to perform certain skills. Thal continues, “I believe that, paradoxically, the more a horse owner knows, the more they know they need us. Fortunately or unfortunately, technology is driving more interaction between horse person and vet that doesn't involve our examining the patient. Horse people may as well be better informed if they are going to be communicating important information to us.”

“I hope that HSVG is of value to other veterinarians as a resource for their clients. I welcome all comments and constructive criticism from my colleagues. We are all in this together.”

“An example of this is something I call the 'Whole Horse Exam', which is a caretaker's equine health assessment. It's more than a TPR. It's the assessment and observation skills I want my clients to know packaged into a single drill. My thought is that if

they can competently perform the exam and record their findings, they will be able to provide accurate information to me and help me better guide them.”

Based on numerous requests, Thal recently launched the new Horse Side Vet Guide website, which provides FREE access to the information contained in the app on the web. The search functionality, using the equine models, once again emphasizes that the proper starting point for addressing any equine health issue is one's power of observation.

Since launch in August 2013, the HSVG app, which is available for iPhone/iPad and Android phones and tablets, has been downloaded in over 60 countries.

It has received many 5-star reviews from horse owners and veterinarians. For more information, please visit [HorseSideVetGuide.com](http://HorseSideVetGuide.com).



Doug Thal has been a horseman his entire life. His father was a steeplechase rider and polo player. He grew up on a family cattle & horse ranch and has been riding and training horses since early childhood. He has been an equine veterinarian since 1993 working on a mix of performance and pleasure horses. His special interests are lameness & surgery. Thal is board certified by the American Board of Veterinary Practitioners, in Equine Practice. He continues to manage his equine veterinary hospital, Thal Equine, in Santa Fe, NM ([ThalEquine.com](http://ThalEquine.com)). He can be reached at [drthal@horsesidevetguide.com](mailto:drthal@horsesidevetguide.com).