

## Practitioner of the Month – October 2018

**Camilla Whishaw - Equine Naturopath at [Optim Equine](#)**

*ATMS spoke to Camilla Whishaw from Optim Equine.*



**Q: How did you get started in natural medicine?**

Growing up, I had some significant health challenges that didn't respond to conventional medicine. This is what started me on my whole journey into natural medicine. It was only after being quite debilitated for some months and actually seeing a Traditional Chinese Medicine practitioner that I finally started to realise what it was like to be well, and that sparked my interest in natural health.

**Q: What kind of work do you do?**

I treat horses with both complex and simple health conditions naturopathically. This involves applying the same basic therapeutic principles as for humans and using suitably indicated herbs and nutraceuticals in doses relevant for horses.

This came about as a result of my own personal health journey. I wanted to study natural medicine and was more interested in the nutritional and ingestive therapeutic approach as opposed to a hands-on therapeutic modality.

My family runs a horse farm in Tasmania and I grew up working with and riding horses. While I was at Uni I continued to work with horses. I have an absolute passion for them.

As I continued my studies and working with horses it became apparent to me that there was a need for solutions to equine health problems. Some people would treat horses with herbs or nutritionals here and there but without any real knowledge of what they were doing. It became apparent to me that there was a place for what I was studying at Uni for horses.

It was ideal in that it combined my true passion, skill set and knowledge and was a unique specialty.

I was offered a scholarship on a program called the Godolphin Flying Start. This involves 12 people being selected from around the world annually and put on a two-year program, which takes you to England, Ireland, America, Dubai, and Australia, to get involved in all facets of The Thoroughbred breeding and the racing industry. This scholarship gave me the opportunity to spend time working alongside some of the best equine vets in the world, collaborating with them, sharing ideas, learning from them, and opening their eyes to naturopathic options.

I saw a great deal of scope for naturopathic treatment in relation to stallion fertility. When I came back to Australia after completing my course, that was an area of focus. And then, effectively I started practicing as an equine naturopath.

**Q. What treatments do you use on the horses?**

The therapeutics I use are predominantly nutraceuticals and Western Herbal Medicine. I always address contributing dietary and management factors, just as you would in human naturopathy.

In addition to treating stallions with fertility issues, I do a lot of work with mare's reproductive health challenges. I work with horses with osteoarthritis, bone conditions, fractures, a lot of gut health, immune health issues. The herbs and nutrients I prescribe are largely dictated by the individual horse I am treating.

A lot of my work initially involves restoring both gut membrane integrity as well as re-inoculating the gut flora. This sets a solid foundation before I start going and addressing more specific aspects of the horse's health. No matter what condition I'm treating, it is rare that I don't start off with promoting good gut health, because so many of the pharmaceutical, nutritional and even management practices in horses don't tend to promote good gut health.

Like humans, you can look at two horses or two people with the same condition or diagnosis but the reason they've got there is very, very different.

**Q: Do you have a remarkable success story?**

One story that stands out to me is a stallion I treated who was 17 years old and was having trouble with fertility. In horses, this is certainly a time where some stallions will start to have a normal decline in fertility rate that is, the number of mares they are able to impregnate becomes less.

When I got there to treat him, I took the case history, and noted he had chronic immune problems, evidenced by consistent oozing pus from his legs and he was constantly on antibiotics and a drug commonly used in horses called Phenylbutazone, which is an NSAID.

Stallions typically tend to have quite a bit of oomph and presence and fieriness. This horse looked sunken and sullen. He was also overweight with poor muscle tone and his fertility rate had dropped from around 80% to below 30%. Although fertility was the issue I'd been called out for, this horse had a lot more going on than that.

When I began treating him I could start to see the changes in his personality, in his condition, in his body composition. His coat improved dramatically, his legs healed, and he became a different horse. During the next season, his fertility went up to about 87% and has remained very high since. Considering his increasing age, his fertility would be expected to naturally decline.

I see any horse I treat as an opportunity to address their overall health, and indeed prescribe effective treatment. You need to address their overall health.

**Q: Do you have any advice for young practitioners starting out in the industry?**

As much as you may just want to focus on your herbs and nutrients when you're studying, I can't stress enough the importance of the challenging (and what seems somewhat

'irrelevant'), foundational subjects in the first couple of years of study. You need to know your illness and disease pathophysiology, know the therapeutic actions of the nutrients you're using, so you can talk the talk, especially when you're dealing with conventional practitioners. As soon as you get in that habit, people start to take you a bit more seriously and give you more respect, rather than just writing you off as some 'natural practitioner'.

Most importantly though, follow your passions. When you feel like throwing the towel in or giving up, remember why you're doing it. Everyone's going to face challenges in life, but you will find that the bigger challenges you face generally lead to your biggest breakthroughs.

**Q: What challenges have you experienced within the industry?**

You're always going to get people who have a poor perception of natural medicine. So, it's become very important to call on your scientific, evidence-based knowledge. Your need to relate your treatments back to the pathophysiology of the condition you're treating. It is important to develop a solid treatment plan and clear aims. It is important to explain to clients how specific herbs and nutrients meet those specific treatment aims through their therapeutic actions, and how this in turn will help them.

**Q. So what's next for you?**

In addition to my consulting in Australia, I'm regularly going back and forth from the U.S. consulting. I'm also consulting in New Zealand and I've been offered the opportunity to explore consulting in South America, England and Ireland, so I'm looking that way, too. I have been approached just this last week to become involved in extensive scientific research in natural therapeutic applications in both equines and other species- so this is quite exciting and keeping me busy!

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**About Camilla:**

Camilla Whishaw is the owner of Optim Equine and has been optimising equine health through naturopathy for many years.

[www.optimequine.com](http://www.optimequine.com)

Camilla has been around horses her whole life and can't believe how lucky she is to be able to combine her two passions, horses and natural health, into one career.

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