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**BONE MINERAL DENSITY CHARACTERISTICS OF THE
THIRD METACARPAL/ METATARSAL DISTAL EPIPHYSIS
OF THOROUGHBRED HORSES**

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This thesis includes two studies using non-invasive imaging techniques to quantify, in detail, the bone mineral density (BMD) characteristics of the distal third metacarpal (Mc3) and metatarsal (Mt3) epiphyses of Thoroughbred horses associated with exercise exposure and condylar fracture. Additionally, the relationship between the bone structure of the distal Mc3/Mt3 epiphysis and incurred cyclic loading, as well as techniques for imaging the area non-invasively, are reviewed.

Mt3 bones from fourteen trained or untrained Thoroughbred horses and Mc3 bones from fourteen Thoroughbred racehorses with or without condylar fracture were scanned using peripheral quantitative computed tomography (pQCT) at a site on the distal epiphysis. The relative proportions of volumetric bone mineral density (BMD_V) and the spatial distribution of BMD_V were quantitatively assessed using conventional and ArcGIS software. The relative proportion of voxels within nine threshold categories of BMD_V and spatial statistics of BMD_V distribution were compared for regions of interest in the palmar/plantar epiphysis between respective treatment groups; trained vs. untrained controls or fractured vs. non-fractured controls.

In study one, trained horses had a significantly higher ($P \leq 0.006$) proportion of high BMD_V voxels and a significantly lower ($P \leq 0.006$) relative proportion of low BMD_V voxels than controls in the central condylar regions of the plantar Mt3 epiphysis. In other regions of the plantar epiphysis the trained horses also had a significantly higher ($P \leq 0.006$) relative proportion of high BMD_V voxels than controls; however, there were no significant differences for the relative proportion of low BMD_V voxels. These relationships were also evident with multiple correspondence analysis. There was strong to marked clustering of high BMD_V voxels in the central condylar region of all of

the trained horses ($I = 0.64 - 1.0$, $P = 0.01$) and no clustering of low BMD_V voxels. In contrast, half of the control horses had clustering of high BMD_V voxels, which was weak to strong ($I = 0.64 - 1.0$, $P = 0.01$) and there was weak to moderate clustering of low BMD_V voxels in the lateral and medial central condylar regions ($I = 0.45-0.62$, $P = 0.01$ and $I = 0.45-0.57$, $P = 0.01$, respectively).

In study two, there were no significant differences between the median age ($P = 0.7$), number of race starts ($P = 0.5$), the relative proportion of BMD_V voxels, or the spatial distribution of BMD_V voxels in regions of the palmar Mc3 epiphysis between the fractured and control groups.

The results of this thesis suggest that the response of bone to exercise is specific in relation to anatomical site, the thresholds of BMD that change, and the spatial distribution of BMD. In both studies the exercise exposure was responsible for much of the variation in the relative proportions and the spatial distributions of BMD_V .

The clinical relevance of these findings are that detailed quantification of previous exercise exposure needs to be considered when determining if a BMD response of the Mt3/Mc3 epiphysis is part of a physiological or pathological finding.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iv
List of abbreviations	vii
List of tables	viii
List of figures	ix

CHAPTER 1

Introduction	1
Literature review	4
Wastage associated with orthopaedic disease in the Thoroughbred racing industry	4
Structure and function of the equine fetlock joint.....	8
The structure of the distal Mc3/Mt3 epiphysis.....	11
The response of bone to cyclic loading	13
Structural changes of the distal Mc3/Mt3 epiphysis in response to exercise	19
Bone diseases of the Mc3/Mt3 epiphysis associated with cyclic loading	22
Investigating the response of bone in the Mc3/Mt3 epiphysis	29

CHAPTER 2

Quantification of exercise induced bone mineral density response in the distal epiphysis of the equine third metatarsal bone

Abstract	38
Introduction	39

Materials and Methods	42
Results	53
Discussion	58
Appendix 1	65
CHAPTER 3 Quantitative comparison of the bone mineral density characteristics of third metacarpal distal epiphyses with and without condylar fracture	
Abstract	67
Introduction	68
Materials and Methods	70
Results	77
Discussion	82
Appendix 2	87
CHAPTER 4	
General discussion	88
References	93

List of abbreviations

BMD	Bone mineral density
BMD _v	Volumetric bone mineral density
CT	Computed tomography
GIS	Geographic information systems
Mc3	Third metacarpal bone
MCA	Multiple correspondence analysis
MRI	Magnetic resonance imaging
MSI	Musculoskeletal injury
Mt3	Third metatarsal bone
POD	Palmar/plantar osteochondral disease
pQCT	Peripheral quantitative computed tomography
PSBs	Proximal sesamoid bones
ROI	Region of interest
SCB	Subchondral bone

Chapter 2

- 2.1:** Adapted scoring system for pathology of the distal Mc3/Mt3 articular surface. **45**
- 2.2:** Modified scoring system for the evaluation of Indian ink uptake. **46**

Chapter 1

1.1: Anatomy of the bones and soft tissue structures of the equine fetlock joint. 10

1.2: Anatomy of the trabeculae and articular surface of the Mc3/Mt3 distal epiphysis. 12

Chapter 2

2.1: ROIs of the plantar articular surface used for pathologic analysis. 44

2.2: ROIs of the plantar epiphysis used for pQCT image analysis. 48

2.3: Reclassification of pQCT images and the ROIs for used for spatial analysis of BMD_v in ArcMap. 52

2.4: The median relative proportion of voxels for BMD_v thresholds in ROIs of the plantar distal epiphysis for exercised and control groups. 55

2.5: MCA plots for BMD_v thresholds and the exercised variable for the ROIs L2P and M2P. 56

Appendix 1

A1.1: MCA plots for BMD_v thresholds and the exercised variable for the ROIs L1P and M1P. 65

A1.2: MCA plots for BMD_v thresholds and the exercise variable for the ROIs LSP and MSP. 66

Chapter 3

3.1: ROIs of the palmar epiphysis used for pQCT image analysis. 73

3.2: Reclassification of pQCT images and the ROIs for used for spatial analysis of BMD_v in ArcMap. 76

3.3: The median relative proportion of voxels for BMD_v thresholds in ROIs of the palmar distal epiphysis for non-fractured and fractured groups. 78

3.4: MCA plots for BMD_v thresholds and the fracture variable for the lateral ROIs L1P, L2P and LSP. 79

Appendix 2

A2.1: MCA plots for BMD_v thresholds and the fracture variable for the medial ROIs M1P, M2P and MSP.

87