

## **What to Do While Waiting for the Vet**

### **By Charles E. Gardner, DVM**

Last month Dr. Reed mentioned some strategies you can take to help things to go well in the case of a prolapsed uterus. This month I will follow up on that theme with some other situations. All of them follow his primary point: take a minute or two to think things through, and then take whatever action makes sense.

The first one is to have the animal restrained. This may seem rather basic, but I can recall many times where our first task after I arrived was to catch my patient. A heifer on pasture, who has been lying for a couple of hours trying to deliver her calf, can suddenly find new energy to get up and run when she sees the vet truck approaching. If nothing else, get a halter on the animal and tie it to something sturdy.

If the cow is lying flat out, get her into a sitting position. Use hay bales or some other objects to keep her sitting. This will keep her from bloating. Look at the surface on which she is lying. Is it slippery? If so, get some sand or dirt and spread it about to help her chances when she tries to rise. If there is a lot of mud or manure, get some bedding down to improve matters for both the cow and your veterinarian.

Have enough help available if you think you'll need it. Returning to the prolapsed uterus, it is important to keep it elevated if the cow is standing. Having two people holding a small piece of plywood under the uterus to keep it at the level of the vagina takes tension off the internal blood vessels, reduces swelling, and makes it easier to replace. You can do this while your veterinarian is on their way. If the uterus is dirty, wash it off with lots of warm clean water, and have plenty more available.

In cases of cuts with a lot of bleeding, try to get the bleeding stopped. If you can see the actual blood vessel, as when the cut is on the udder, use a vice grip or a strong clothespin to clamp it. If you cannot see the vessel, apply direct pressure with a clean cloth. It does not take long for a cow to bleed to death with a cut mammary or udder vein. If the animal is in a dark area, get some light. Things go better when we can see what we are doing.

I mentioned bloating earlier. Ruminants that are stretched out flat cannot burp, and so they bloat. The first thing to do with a bloated cow is to get her sitting up. If that does not relieve the bloat, try running a flexible tube (a milker hose is about the right size) down her throat into her rumen. Run the hose through a short piece of PVC pipe in her mouth to keep her from chewing through the hose. Watch your fingers! Cows can bite pretty hard. You only need to take this step if the bloat is so severe that the animal is having trouble breathing. Otherwise, you can wait for your vet to come.

If the problem is a cow not able to deliver her calf, you may be able to help by thoroughly cleaning her vulva and surrounding area, and then reaching in with a plastic glove to check things out. If you can feel two legs and a head coming normally, you can try pulling with moderate force. Have some type of approved lubricant on hand to make things easier. Do not spend excessive time if you cannot get the calf easily.

It is never easy to watch an animal in distress while waiting for help to come. Keep in mind that your veterinarian may be attending another emergency when you call, and he or she may be many miles away. Taking some basic steps as you wait can definitely improve matters when he or she arrives.