Ovariohysterectomy following uterine rupture in a ewe

E.L. Larsonberg, M. Ciccarelli, L.K. Pearson, A.J. Campbell, A. Tibary
Comparative Theriogenology, Department of Veterinary Clinical Sciences, Washington State University
College of Veterinary Medicine, Pullman, WA

Small ruminant periparturient emergencies account for the majority of flock losses.¹ Despite the complicated nature of these cases, some breeders attempt to manage them without veterinary assistance, compromising the animal’s welfare and prognosis. This report describes uterine torsion in a ewe followed by an unsuspected uterine rupture and surgical treatment by ovariohysterectomy.

A two–year-old parous Icelandic ewe was presented for failure of parturition at the expected due date. The ewe was progressing normally one week prior to the due date and showed mammary gland enlargement, then became lethargic and weak. The owner managed her at home for pregnancy toxemia. The ewe recovered clinically but her mammary regressed. On presentation five weeks following mammary development, physical examination and thorough reproductive evaluation were performed. Vaginal speculum examination revealed a closed cervix. Ultrasonographic evaluation showed an irregular outline of the uterus and fetus(es) that appeared macerated. A cesarean section was elected using a ventral midline approach. Following the skin incision, the linea alba was visibly congested and thickened. Incising the linea immediately exposed the fetuses, suggesting a uterine rupture. The fetuses were removed. The uterus was adhered to the body wall sealing the uterine contents from the viscera. Careful dissection of the adhesions freed the uterus from the abdominal wall. Exploration revealed a 180° uterine torsion and advanced uterine necrosis. Ovariohysterectomy was performed. Post-operatively the ewe received antibiotics and was discharged. The ewe suffered no surgical complications and returned to fiber production.

The clinical presentation for pregnancy toxemia, failure of cervical dilation, and uterine torsion can be similar. Uterine torsion and rupture is rarely reported but should be considered a differential diagnosis in overdue, recumbent ewes. Breeders should consider an overdue ewe with mammary development and regression without parturition an emergency. Owners should be educated on the welfare issues associated with peripartum emergencies.

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Reference