

# Fractures in regions of adaptive modeling and remodeling of central tarsal bones in racing Greyhounds

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**Objective**—To evaluate and compare bone modeling and remodeling in fractured and nonfractured central tarsal bones (CTBs) of racing Greyhounds.

**Sample**—Paired cadaveric tarsi from 6 euthanized racing Greyhounds with right CTB fractures and 6 racing Greyhounds with other nontarsal injuries.

**Procedures**—CTBs were dissected and fractured CTBs were reconstructed. Central tarsal bones were evaluated through standard and nonscreen high-detail radiography, computed tomography, and histologic examination. The bone mineral density (BMD) was calculated adjacent to fracture planes and as a gradient on sagittal computed tomographic images. Sagittal and transverse plane sections of bone were obtained and submitted for subjective histologic assessment. Linear mixed-effects models were used to compare findings.

**Results**—Fractured right CTBs had greater BMD in the dorsal and midbody regions of the sagittal plane sections than did nonfractured CTBs. The BMD ratios from bone adjacent to the dorsal slab fracture planes were not different between fractured and nonfractured right CTBs.

**Conclusions and Clinical Relevance**—Findings supported the existence of site-specific bone adaptation in CTBs of Greyhounds, with modeling and remodeling patterns that were unique to fractured right CTBs. The dorsal and midbody regions of fractured bones had greater BMD, and fractures occurred through these zones of increased BMD. (*Am J Vet Res* 2012;73:375–380)

Fracture of cuboidal bones in the foot is common in human and other mammalian athletes. Fatigue fracture of these bones, particularly of the central (navicular) tarsal bone, is believed to be caused by repetitive loading, site-specific bone modeling and remodeling, and subsequent fatigue failure.<sup>1–3</sup> Racing Greyhounds are excellent subjects by which to study adaptive mod-

## ABBREVIATIONS

BMD	Bone mineral density
CT	Computed tomography
CTB	Central tarsal bone
PMMA	Polymethylmethacrylate
PPED	Dipotassium phosphate equivalent density
ROI	Region of interest

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eling and fatigue because their right and left limbs are asymmetrically loaded during training and racing counterclockwise on oval tracks. Located on the medial aspect of the outside limb, right CTBs are subjected to substantially greater compressive loads than are left CTBs and consequently sustain as much as 96% of fractures.<sup>4</sup> An increase in load on the right CTB causes that bone to increase in size and sustain a greater amount of matrix microdamage than the contralateral bone.<sup>1,2</sup>

Catastrophic failure of the CTB has been proposed to be due to coalescence of the microcracks, inadequate reparative response, or weakness during bone resorption amid an extensive remodeling process within the bone.<sup>1,5–7</sup> However, fractured CTBs from racing Greyhounds have not been rigorously evaluated and the nature of any important differences between fractured and nonfractured right CTBs remains unclear.

The purpose of the study reported here was to evaluate CTBs from skeletally mature racing Greyhounds and determine whether there were site-specific modeling and remodeling responses in naturally occurring fractures in right CTBs, with use of standard and contact radiography, CT, and histologic evaluation. We hypothesized that unique site-specific modeling and remodeling patterns would be detected in fractured bones. Specifically, we hypothesized that the BMD of fractured right CTBs would be greater than that of intact right and left CTBs and that dorsal slab fractures would occur through a transition zone between bone tissues of differing densities.

## Materials and Methods

**Animals**—Pelvic limbs were collected from 12 skeletally mature racing Greyhounds after euthanasia. Dogs were euthanized at their owners' request after CTB fracture or other nontarsal racing injuries. Reasons for euthanasia were unrelated to the study. Dogs were excluded when there was gross or radiographic evidence of a reparative response associated with the tarsal fractures. The harvested pelvic limbs were stored at  $-80^{\circ}\text{C}$  until used in the study. Details about the age, sex, weight, and racing history of the dogs were not available.

**Radiographic evaluation of the tarsus**—Mediolateral, plantarodorsal, plantarolateral-dorsomedial oblique, and plantaromedial-dorsolateral oblique radiographic views of each tarsus were obtained to determine injury status. The radiographs were evaluated for evidence of tarsal bone fractures. Central tarsal bone fractures were classified into 5 types in accordance with a preexisting scheme.<sup>8</sup>

**CT evaluation of the tarsus**—Measurement of BMD was performed by use of a fourth-generation helical CT scanner<sup>a</sup> and a high-detail bone algorithm (Figure 1). Limbs were positioned in the scanner with foam blocks and tape. A series of 1-mm contiguous transverse and sagittal plane images was acquired by use of a  $512 \times 512$  matrix (voxel element,  $0.075 \text{ mm}^3$ ) and a 140-mm field of view. A dipotassium phosphate phantom<sup>b</sup> was included with each specimen. The phantom contained 5 cylinders of known tissue-equivalent densities; these included dipotassium phosphate solution (200, 100, and 50 mg/mL), water, and high-density polyethylene. Use of the phantom enabled internal calibration and direct quantification of BMDs. Computed tomographic attenuation data were converted from Hounsfield units to PPED (mg/mL) to enable comparisons with data obtained from other scanners by use of a regression equation as described elsewhere.<sup>9</sup> The CT images were evaluated for tarsal fractures, and the configurations of the CTB fractures were recorded.

**CTB reconstruction and imaging**—Central tarsal bones were dissected from each tarsus. Fractured CTBs were anatomically reconstructed with the aid of cyanoacrylate.<sup>c</sup> All CTBs were fixed in neutral-buffered 10% formalin and embedded in PMMA under vacuum.

Computed tomographic imaging of individual PMMA-embedded CTBs was performed in the transverse and sagittal planes, as previously described (Figure 1). Hounsfield units were converted to PPED.<sup>9</sup> One

transverse and sagittal slice of each bone was selected at the midpoint of the proximodistal and mediolateral planes, respectively. From these images, BMD was assessed in 2 ways. First, BMD was measured in 6 ROIs (area,  $0.79 \text{ mm}^2$ ) located midway between the proximal and distal articular surface of the CTB in the sagittal plane (Figure 2). It was then measured adjacent to the dorsal slab fracture line in both the sagittal plane and the transverse plane. On the basis of the overall size of the fractured CTB, each bone had 2 or 3 ROIs (area,  $0.79 \text{ mm}^2$ ) on either side of the dorsal slab fracture line. Drawings made on acetate overlays were made to measure BMD in similar anatomic locations in intact right CTBs. These BMD measurements were expressed as a ratio of the dorsal value to the plantar value. The ratio calculated from fractured CTBs was compared with ratios calculated from intact right CTBs.

**Histologic preparation and evaluation**—The PMMA-embedded, reconstructed CTBs were sectioned into 2 slices with a commercially available diamond saw system.<sup>d</sup> First, 1 slice approximately  $150 \mu\text{m}$  in thickness was obtained in the midsagittal plane from each PMMA-embedded CTB. The CTBs were then reconstructed with the aid of cyanoacrylate,<sup>c</sup> and another slice approximately  $150$

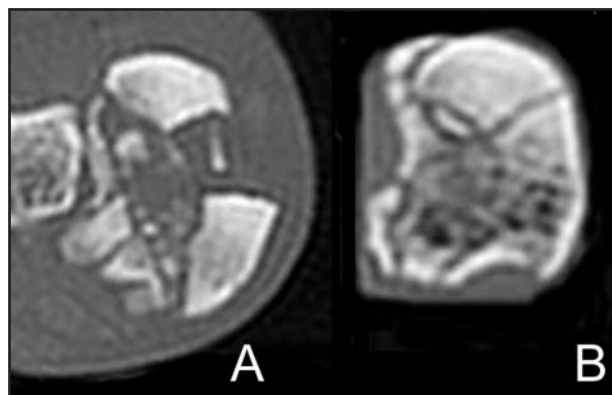


Figure 1—Computed tomographic images of a fractured right CTB from the cadaver of a racing Greyhound. A transverse section of the fractured CTB in situ (A) is compared with a transverse section of the same bone after dissection and reconstruction (B). The bone in panel B is embedded in PMMA. The medial aspect of the bone is to the right in the images.

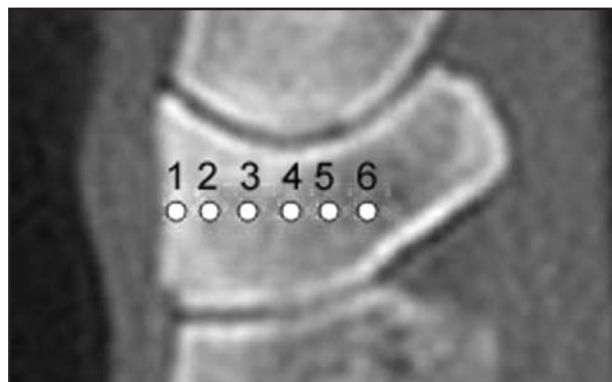


Figure 2—Representative CT image of a CTB from a cadaver of a racing Greyhound used to calculate BMD. Bone mineral density was calculated in six 1-mm ROIs on CT images in the sagittal plane of each CTB. The regions 1 through 6 were oriented in a dorsal to plantar direction.

µm in thickness was obtained in the transverse plane, located half the distance from the proximal and distal articular surfaces of the CTB. Each slice was ground to a thickness of 100 µm on a surface grinder<sup>e</sup> and surface stained with Masson trichrome.

Transverse and sagittal sections of each CTB were evaluated by use of light microscopy at 4X and 10X magnification. Bones were evaluated qualitatively to assess bone type and to confirm the absence of fracture repair processes. Nonscreen high-detail radiographs at a peak voltage of 32 to 35 kV and amperage of 3 mA for 90 seconds were obtained for each 100-µm section with a cabinet radiography system.<sup>f</sup> These radiographs were evaluated for qualitative variations in BMD.

**Statistical analysis**—Data analyses were performed through linear mixed-effects modeling with the aid of statistical software.<sup>g</sup> The models included the following factors: fracture status (fractured vs nonfractured), bone identity (right vs left), and either ROI or BMD ratio (outcome). All 2- and 3-way interactions among these factors were evaluated. Values of  $P < 0.05$  were considered significant.

## Results

**Fracture evaluation**—Six dogs had fractures in the right CTB. Findings of standard radiography, CT, and

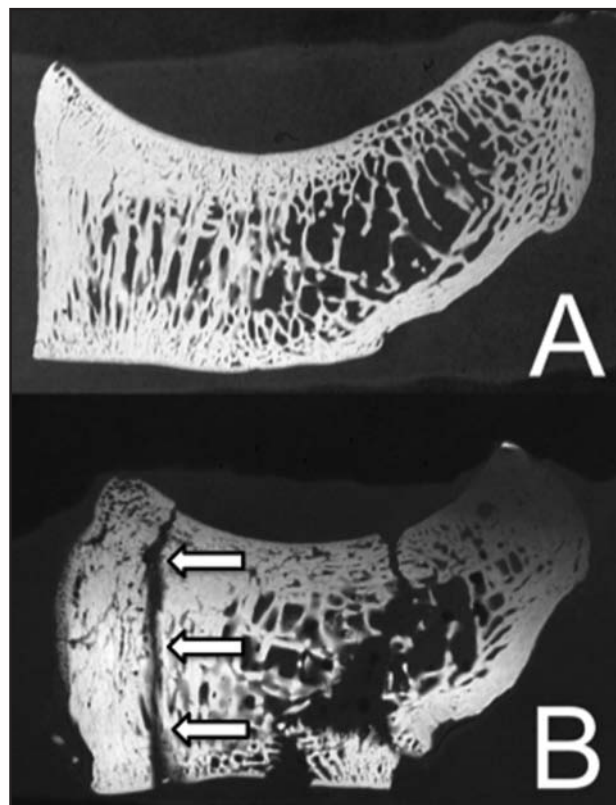


Figure 3—Representative nonscreen high-detail radiographs from sagittal plane sections of intact left (A) and fractured right (B) CTBs from the cadaver of a racing Greyhound. The proximal articular surface, the talocalcaneal joint, is uppermost in both panels, with the dorsal aspect of the bone facing to the left. Increased BMD is evident in the fractured CTB, compared with BMD in the nonfractured CTB. The dorsal slab fracture is located in compact bone through regions of increased BMD (arrows).

gross evaluation of CTB fractures were in agreement, and all allowed correct identification of 5 type IV (dorsal and medial slab) fractures and 1 type II (dorsal slab) fracture of the right CTB. In addition to these fractures, 5 dogs had additional tarsal bone fractures. None of the 6 dogs with fractures had evidence of fracture healing on imaging or gross evaluation. No injury was identified in the contralateral tarsus in any of these dogs. The remaining 6 dogs were confirmed free of injury in both tarsi via radiography, CT, and gross evaluation.

**BMD**—When the BMDs from all 6 sagittal ROIs were combined for both right and left CTBs, dogs that had a fracture had greater BMD than did dogs without a fracture ( $P = 0.001$ ; Figure 3). There was no difference in summed BMD between fractured and intact right CTBs ( $P = 0.55$ ). When each ROI was evaluated separately, however, the BMD in region 1 of fractured CTBs was greater than the BMD in region 1 in dogs that did not sustain a CTB fracture (Figure 4; Table 1). Fractured right CTBs had greater BMD in regions 2 through 4 than did contralateral CTBs from dogs with fractures or both CTBs from dogs without fractures. Among dogs that did not sustain CTB fracture, there were no significant differences in BMD between right and left CTB in any region. The BMD ratio in the regions of the dorsal slab fracture was not significantly different between fractured and intact right CTBs in both the sagittal and transverse planes.

**Histologic evaluation**—The cross-sectional area of right CTBs was subjectively greater than that of left CTBs, primarily because of periosteal bone formation that was present on the dorsal and medial aspects of the bones. Absolute measurement of total bone area was not possible in several fractured bones because of comminution in the plantar process and the plantarodistal aspects of the bone. Evaluation of the histologic sections revealed that the dense bone in the dorsal region of both the fractured and intact CTBs was composed of primarily lamellar, nonosteonal, compact bone. Several sections had a mild degree of osteonal remodeling present in this region. Fractured right CTBs had increased BMD attributable to coalescence and thickening of

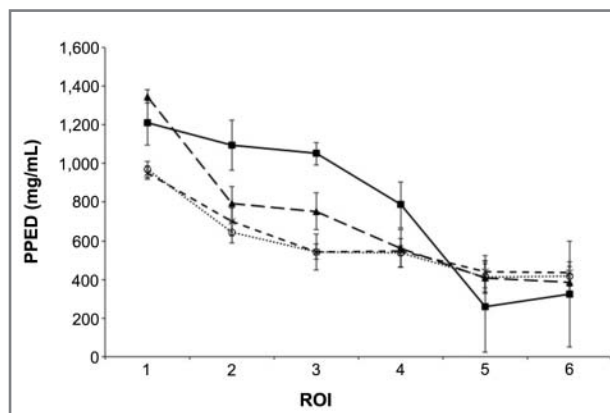


Figure 4—Mean  $\pm$  SE BMD in 6 regions (dorsal [1] to plantar [6]) in the sagittal plane of CTBs from cadavers of racing Greyhounds. Dogs with fracture of the right CTB (solid line) had significantly ( $P < 0.05$ ) greater BMD at regions 2, 3, and 4 than in the contralateral nonfractured left CTB (long-dashed line) and the right (short-dashed line) and left (dotted line) CTBs from Greyhounds without a CTB fracture.

Table 1—Bone marrow density (PPED [mg/mL]) in 6 ROIs in both CTBs from cadavers of racing Greyhounds with a fracture in the right CTB (n = 6 dogs) and Greyhounds with nonfractured CTBs (6).

ROI	CTB	Dogs with fracture			Dogs without fracture		
		25th percentile	Mean	75th percentile	25th percentile	Mean	75th percentile
1	Right	1,138.8	1,211.1	1,273.1	905.9	952.2	973.4
	Left	1,296.2	1,346.3	1,368.6	930.2	969.6	1,031.0
2	Right	925.1	1,094.2 <sup>a</sup>	1,247.1	575.6	698.3 <sup>b</sup>	817.3
	Left	739.1	791.2 <sup>b</sup>	866.6	607.4	644.8 <sup>b</sup>	661.5
3	Right	934.8	1,050.4 <sup>a</sup>	1,136.4	347.6	543.0 <sup>b</sup>	731.7
	Left	723.1	753.1 <sup>b</sup>	851.6	497.5	543.3 <sup>b</sup>	623.4
4	Right	561.7	785.8 <sup>a</sup>	1,002.3	491.5	548.7 <sup>b</sup>	586.5
	Left	513.7	559.7 <sup>b</sup>	679.9	470.4	538.3 <sup>b</sup>	528.8
5	Right	-14.0	258.9	508.9	307.5	438.4	553.0
	Left	295.3	407.4	498.8	285.6	411.2	431.5
6	Right	184.5	324.3	707.9	361.3	434.1	446.7
	Left	290.0	385.1	474.3	332.2	414.9	535.8

<sup>a,b</sup>Different superscript letters indicate a significant ( $P < 0.05$ ) difference between groups and between sides within the same ROI.

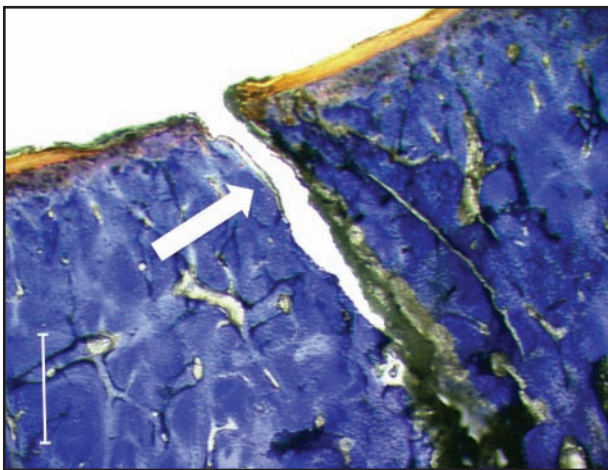


Figure 5—Photomicrograph of the dorsal articular surface of a fractured right CTB from the cadaver of a racing Greyhound. Fractures occurred through zones of increased BMD. The fracture line is indicated (arrow). Bar = 1.0 mm; Masson trichrome stain.

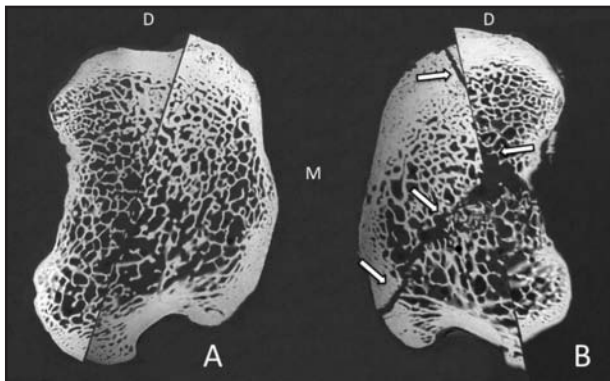


Figure 6—Nonscreen high-detail radiographs from transverse sections of the nonfractured (A) and fractured (B) right CTBs from the cadaver of a racing Greyhound. The BMD in the dorsal (D) and medial (M) aspects of the fractured CTB was greater than in the nonfractured CTB and was attributable to thickening and coalescence of trabeculi. The original fracture line is indicated (arrows).

trabeculae and a decrease in the marrow space on the dorsal and plantar aspects of the dorsal slab fracture

plane. The fractures traversed through the dorsal and midbody regions of the CTB, which consisted of bone that was uniformly and grossly increased in density, compared with the density in other regions (Figure 5). This response was most prominent on the dorsal and medial aspects of the CTB (Figure 6). Periosteal modeling was evident on the dorsal slab of fractured CTBs, which primarily consisted of woven bone, but was not seen in the contralateral intact CTBs.

## Discussion

Orthopedic fatigue fractures pose a considerable problem for human, equine, and canine athletes.<sup>4,10-12</sup> These fractures occur most commonly in long bones; data on naturally occurring stress fractures in cuboidal bones are sparse.<sup>5,10,13-18</sup> In diaphyseal bone, fatigue fractures have been hypothesized to occur in response to microdamage within bone.<sup>1,7,13</sup> Cyclic loading of long bones results in an increase in cortical size and microdamage (ie, microcracks). Fatigue fractures are believed to occur because of an imbalance between microdamage formation and repair by remodeling: microcracks accumulate until catastrophic failure occurs through crack propagation or coalescence.<sup>1,2,7,11,19</sup>

Less is known about stress fractures in cuboidal bones. Cuboidal bones have a characteristic anatomic structure, consisting of  $\geq 2$  articular surfaces, an outer shell of cortical bone, and inner trabecular bone. This structure of cuboidal bones may cause them to behave differently than diaphyseal bone. The CTB is a unique cuboidal bone. The largest of its 7 articular surfaces is the proximal concave articulation with the talus. Because of the size and shape of that articulation, the human navicular tarsal bone is suspected to be primarily subjected to compressive loading<sup>3</sup>; however, the load distribution patterns across canine CTBs have not been identified. The concave shape of the proximal articular surface may distribute stress and strain in unique ways, resulting in adaptive modeling and remodeling that may contribute meaningfully to stress fractures that are commonly seen in this bone.<sup>2,3</sup>

The counterclockwise racing pattern and asymmetric loading of the CTB in racing Greyhounds result

in preferential fracture of the right CTB. In addition to asymmetric loading during turns, Greyhounds do not slow their foot contact with the ground and, as a result, have a 71% increase in effective body weight on the limb during each step.<sup>20</sup> Although the magnitude and distribution of these forces on CTBs have not been evaluated *in vivo*, this increase in acute loading of the limb may provide the supraphysiological load needed to push the limits of bone strength, even in a well-conditioned dog.

Nonfractured CTBs of racing Greyhounds have features of asymmetric modeling and remodeling.<sup>2</sup> Right CTBs have evidence of cortical bone thickening, coalescence of trabeculae, and increased BMD, in comparison with left CTBs.<sup>2</sup> Microcracks within the bone matrix are more dense and have a greater length in intact right CTBs, than in the left counterparts.<sup>1</sup> Examination of the dorsal slab fragments of naturally occurring right CTB fractures of Greyhounds revealed large branching arrays of microcracks in a previous study.<sup>19</sup> The relationship of matrix microdamage, asymmetric modeling, and remodeling to the occurrence of CTB fracture is unclear because entire fractured right CTBs from racing Greyhounds have not been extensively evaluated. In the present study, fatigue fractures in the CTBs of racing Greyhounds were examined, revealing a significant difference in BMD in right CTBs that fractured, compared with the BMD in those that did not. Although the periosteal bone response in right CTBs was similar to observations made in another study,<sup>2</sup> we identified unique differences in fractured bones that have not previously been reported. Fractures occurred through a region of increased BMD in the dorsal and middorsal regions of the CTB. These new data support that site-specific remodeling of the CTB occurs and suggest that the degree of remodeling may be directly related to fracture occurrence.

Previously, only the dorsal region of right CTBs was reported to have increased BMD relative to other regions.<sup>2</sup> The increase in BMD within the more planar regions of fractured CTBs in our study may suggest a progressive process of uncoupled bone remodeling resulting in bone that is too dense to sustain the applied loads. A correlation between increased BMD and fracture occurrence has been reported for humans that received chronic bisphosphonate treatment.<sup>21,22</sup> In such purposeful circumstances of induced uncoupled bone remodeling, it has been hypothesized that the bone, although more dense than before treatment, was also more brittle, predisposing patients to fatigue fracture.<sup>21,22</sup>

Cyclic loading of bones can cause reorientation and stiffening of the subchondral bone,<sup>23</sup> and this may contribute to CTB fracture in some dogs. Investigation into the subchondral bone and trabecular orientation in the navicular tarsal bone of human athletes would be interesting. Microhardness testing of Greyhound CTBs may yield insight into material properties of the combined mineral and organic matrix and might reveal additional information regarding etiology of fracture in this breed.

Among dogs in the present study, the BMD ratio from locations on either side of the dorsal slab fracture

plane was not different between fractured and intact right CTBs. This indicates that there was not a unique density differential in the dorsal slab region in bones that sustained a fracture. Therefore, a large modulus mismatch in this region of bone may not have played a role in the occurrence of fracture. Data from the present study did not support our hypothesis that CTB fractures occur through a transition zone of bone with differing densities. Instead, the dorsal and midbody regions had similar and increased BMD, relative to other measured regions, and the fractures occurred through these regions of greater uniform density.

Additional postmortem evaluation, including micro-CT, microhardness testing, trabecular compression testing, and immunohistochemical analysis, might aid in elucidating the cause of CTB fractures in racing Greyhounds. Linear prospective studies to investigate *in vivo* BMD and medullary cavity changes in response to training could provide important information. Differences in BMD in the present study were detected by means of diagnostic equipment that is available in veterinary practice and may be used for future clinical studies. Nuclear scintigraphy, magnetic resonance imaging, dual energy x-ray absorptiometry, and peripheral quantitative CT may be used to evaluate lower extremity stress fracture in live subjects.<sup>24</sup> It is possible that with prospective screening, changes within a CTB could be detected prior to catastrophic failure.

The present study had several limitations, including the small sample size and presumably consequent limited power to detect differences. Little was known about the details of the racing histories, age, or sex of the Greyhounds used, and these factors may play a role in the magnitude and pattern of modeling and remodeling changes in CTBs.<sup>12</sup> Although all CTB fractures contained a dorsal slab component, each had unique fracture patterns that also introduced variability into the analysis. Additionally, the study involved one 1-mm bone slice in 2 planes for each dog, and it is possible that the changes in these slices were not representative of the bone in its entirety.

The data reported here support the existence of site-specific modeling and remodeling in fractured right CTBs of racing Greyhounds. The changes in these bones differed from those in intact CTBs and may represent a progression of changes caused by excessive matrix microdamage or brittle bone quality. Fractures occurred through the dorsal and midbody regions of the right CTB. The dorsal and midbody regions had a uniformly increased BMD, relative to other measured regions of the CTB. This finding does not support the hypothesis that CTB fractures occur by way of a modulus mismatch created by adjacent bone of substantially different BMD. Additional investigation is warranted into the material properties of the CTB to allow identification of additional factors that may play a role in the pathogenesis of CTB fracture in racing Greyhounds and other athletes.

- a. Picker PQS, Philips Medical Systems NA, Bothell, Wash.
- b. Dipotassium phosphate phantom, model 3T, Mindways Software Inc, San Francisco, Calif.
- c. The Original Super Glue, Super Glue Corp, Rancho Cucamonga, Calif.

- d. Model 340CP, Exakt Technologies Inc, Oklahoma City, Okla.
- e. EXAKT Technologies, Exakt Technologies Inc, Oklahoma City, Okla.
- f. Faxitron, model 43855A, Faxitron X-ray LLC, Lincolnshire, Ill.
- g. SAS, version 9.1.3, SAS Institute Inc, Cary, NC.

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