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FROM THE DESK OF DR. JEFF BUNN

Once again I've been corralled into my office to put pen to paper in the hopes of educating and entertaining my loyal readers. I hope that this writing finds all of you and your horses healthy and happy. Everyone in the office is healthy and doing well, even Dixie who has recovered completely from her fractured ribs of this past winter.

One notable as of August, Dr. Shaarda is the proud father of a baby girl named "Anna". That makes three for the Shaarda's. Needless to say Dr. Shaarda appears a little tired in the morning these days and is quite incoherent until his first cup of coffee.

On a sadder note, Dr. Rubie lost her old dog "Dottie" recently at the age of 16. We all feel for her loss.

If you have not yet visited our web site www.equinemedical.com, please take a moment to check it out. We've been adding information and links as necessary to better keep our clients informed as to what's happening on the local equine health front. Dixie and Joyce have been working hard to ensure that it's up to date and that our "electronic" capabilities are continually improving.

ECONOMICS

Obviously, this is an issue that has affected everyone, including the equine industry. As a clinic we have tried to keep our prices as low as we can and still offer the absolute best service possible. As many of you know, this is becoming more challenging every day. It seems that the more costs increase the less discretionary income people have to spend on their horses. It is our hope that horse owners will not overlook the value of preventative medicine relative to cost. It is widely accepted in the human medical world that the cost of preventative medicine (periodic physical exams, immunizations, dental work, etc.) is much more cost effective than treating a problem due to lack of earlier intervention. One example of this would be a patient that has ingested a large volume of sand which could have been discovered during a routine physical exam. If diagnosed early and appropriate therapy is initiated, an expensive emergency call after hours (or worse) could be averted.

Now may be a good time to enroll your horse in one of our "Wellness Programs". The details can be checked out on our web site www.equinemedical.com. In short, this is a prepaid preventative health care program for your horse. The amount paid is determined by the level of care you wish your horse to receive. A years worth of preventative veterinary care is paid upfront by the end of March. The economic advantage to you is that no matter how much our farm call and other charges may go up throughout the year, those increases will not be allocated to you! You will also have the peace of mind knowing that your horse is getting the best care possible with all of their

health records in one location. Another benefit to you is that if your horse is hospitalized at our clinic to treat a colic episode, your bill will be reduced by 10%.

WINTERIZING YOUR HORSE

If done properly, this may be the most economical thing you do to prevent emergency problems. There are a few basic rules that need to be applied to ensure your horse's well being in the cold winter months.

First and foremost is feed. The most common question asked of veterinarians is "What should I be feeding my horse?" The answer is simple: Good quality hay (roughage)! The most important aspect of any horse's ration, young or old is hay. Most of the health issues I see, whether it be respiratory or gastro-intestinal are related to hay.

Hay is important for a number of reasons. For one, the horse's GI tract is built to digest hay and break it down into volatile fatty acids (VFA's), which in turn are used for energy. The large colon and cecum of the horse is "huge" by all standards, having a capacity of 50 to 80 gallons, which is where the VFA's are manufactured by the fermentation and digestion of hay. The actual digestion of hay not only produces necessary nutrients (energy, protein, water soluble vitamins, etc.) for the horse, but also produces body heat. Grass hay is by far the most common hay type available, and is adequate by itself as the sole feed source for the majority of horses, with the exception of old, very active and young growing horses.

The urban myth that horses can not eat second cutting alfalfa is just that, a myth. Alfalfa is rich in protein and calcium, therefore necessitating feeding a smaller amount than you would need to feed 1st cutting alfalfa or grass hay. Words of caution, if you are going to feed 2nd cutting alfalfa, have lots of water available for your horse to drink. Two byproducts of alfalfa digestion are ammonia and calcium, both of which are eliminated through their kidneys. In order to eliminate the additional calcium and ammonia from the kidneys, horses require more water. This in turn enhances water consumption. Increase water consumption has two benefits. For one it keeps ingesta (feed material within the GI tract) moist and thus better movement through the digestive tract. Secondly it also maintains kidney health, thus the old myth that Alfalfa will cause kidney problems, is not true.

The only issue I have with 2nd cutting alfalfa hay is that due to the decreased amount that needs to be fed, horses often finish their hay quickly and soon after start searching the ground for anything else they feel may be edible (weeds, sand, fences, trees, etc.). Horses have an innate desire to graze, so to try to reduce this compulsion, it is important, especially in our sandy soils, that they have a somewhat of a "full" feeling before being cut loose on the pasture. I manage this by offering both 2nd cutting alfalfa hay and 1st cutting alfalfa/grass mix to my horses. Not only does this decrease my overall expense in hay, but also gives my two old guys something to munch on (first cutting hay) after they finish their dessert. I find that if I offer more of the less nutrient dense first cutting and less of the "high octane" second cutting, I'm able to maintain their weight adequately.

Remember that horse's ribs are meant "to be felt and not seen". Every horse should be fed as an individual because each horse has a different metabolic rate. The rule of thumb is that a horse should consume 2% on a dry matter basis of their body weight daily in hay. For a 1000 lb horse, that is equivalent to 20-25lbs total daily hay consumption.

Some people have been able to maintain their horses on the more economical "round bales" instead of the traditional "square bales". I personally do not have a problem with "round bales". The key is whether or not the hay in the "round bales" was given ample time to cure before harvesting, and if the hay was stored in a dry place while waiting to be used as a feed source. Unfortunately, round bales tend to be harvested while the hay is still damp, resulting in the formation of mold spores in the bale. Horses can develop chronic respiratory conditions similar to asthma when they are exposed to these spores.

Due to the increased cost of hay, I see more and more folks trying to get by with less. Please, if you have to cut expenses, do so by not buying as much "sweet feed" and instead invest in quality hay. The dividends you get in return are huge. If they're busy eating hay, that means they are not eating dirt. And believe me, **Dirt in the horse's digestive tract is a Bad thing!**

Water is obviously extremely important as well. Horses should always have clean, drinkable water available. I emphasize the drinkable because many horses have water available, but it is not drinkable for a number of reasons.

One reason horses will not drink is because the water is just too darn cold. This is especially noticed in our older horses whose teeth may be somewhat cold sensitive. Obviously the remedy is to make the water more temperate by adding a heating element or by offering warm water to drink from the house. With my horses, I have a water tank outside that I have installed a heating element in. The problem I have with my fastidious charges is that they will not drink as long as I have the element plugged in. Now I have checked over and over again for "stray voltage" and have yet to find any. I can only surmise that the heated water may have a different taste that my horses do not like. I have corrected this problem by building a wooden box around my tank that has 3 inch pink foam insulation adhered to the inside, as well as a lid, which is also insulated. I have found over the years, that if I close the lid on my "water tank box" at night with the tank heater on, and open the lid in the morning, turning my heater off, the horses will consume an appreciable amount of water throughout the day. I also offer them water at night in their stalls, and have found the heated buckets to work the best on the coldest of nights. However, most nights I just put normal 50 degree tap water in their buckets. Since I built my insulated box, my water tank rarely freezes over during the day, and my electric bill is greatly reduced.

I'm often asked about winter blankets. I'm neither a proponent nor opponent of blankets. I do believe that blankets are worthwhile especially during those cold fall and spring rains by which the blankets can protect the horses from getting wet. Once their hair coats are wet, they lose all of their natural insulation capabilities. Otherwise, during dry days, blankets are not necessary. I also believe that if you use blankets on your horses, please periodically remove their blankets and take a critical look at your horses body condition score (check out our web site for more info on body condition scores). I've seen blanketed horses become grossly obese, as well as grossly skinny under the disguise of a winter blanket.

Winter and colic go hand in hand. By offering an adequate amount of good quality hay, and fresh, free choice water, you can reduce your likelihood of dealing with a colic episode dramatically.

HOUSEKEEPING

Believe it or not, we are making preparations for our annual client educational seminar which will be on Sunday January 25th from 1:00-4:00 pm at the Lowell Middle School. For this year's session, we have asked Dr. Hal Schott from Michigan State University to come and speak on Cushings Disease as well as other metabolic diseases which are common to horses. Because of this year's increasing number of laminitis (founder) cases I have treated, I believe this to be a very timely

topic. We have yet to secure another speaker; and/or entertainer! We will be sending out post cards and spam e-mails after the Holidays for you to respond to and complete your reservations if you would like to attend.

One of my instructors in vet school once said that "as veterinarians we are overeducated for what economics allows us to do." Unfortunately, this is true now more than ever. We are now offering "*Care Credit*" to our clients as another method by which you can pay for veterinary care for your horses. *Care Credit* is a company that people can use to obtain credit to pay for unexpected veterinary bills. *Care Credit* is used by a number of other professionals including dentists and orthodontists. If you may be interested in this, please call and ask Dixie to send you more information. You may also check it out and/or apply online at www.carecredit.com .

If I may, I would like to take a brief moment in asking a few favors of you. This will help us in our continued efforts to be efficient. One of the ways in which you can do this is to have your horses caught and ready for their exams when we arrive. We strive to have our clients called immediately before we arrive so that we can maintain our work flow and not inconvenience people anymore than necessary. I would also ask that if for some reason you need to cancel your appointment, please be courteous and call us 24 hours in advance so that we can schedule another needing patient in that time slot!

As always, thank you for your continued support and trust in us!

God Bless,

The Staff at Equine Medical LLC