

SPRING 2009

FROM THE DESK OF DR. JEFF BUNN

Once again spring is upon us with a new set of demands and challenges for us and our horses. With the economic strains being placed upon all of us it has become paramount that we institute the most cost effective measures to us enable to provide the best treatment options for you and your horse's health care. An old professor once said that "we as veterinarians are overeducated for what economics allows us to do". His words ring truer than ever in these ever challenging times. With these issues in mind we have adopted a few policies that hopefully will ease some of the strain.

1. In spite of increased costs, we have **not** raised prices this year.
2. Our office call continues to be \$15.00.
3. Vaccine prices remain the same as they were in 2007.
4. On Saturdays **March 28th** and **April 25th** we are offering a discounted vaccination day at our clinic. For those two days there will be no office call charged to anyone that brings their horse(s) to the clinic for immunizations and/or Coggins testing. Please call ahead to reserve your spot.
5. We have introduced some new payment options for clients to help meet their financial obligations with us (Care Credit).
6. We have extended our business hours to include a limited number of Saturday appointments from March 21 to August 1.
7. We continue to offer our four (4) wellness programs that provide one year of complete veterinary care at a discounted rate. Call our office or visit our web site www.equinemedical.com for further information.

Care Credit is a credit service that can be applied for at our office or online. It is a credit service that allows for payment up to 90 days, "same as cash" on most balances. Recently we have had a few clients take advantage of this service to help them pay for everything from a routine dental floating to colic surgery. Check it out at www.carecredit.com.

Our decision to extend our office hours to Saturdays makes it possible for clients to have their horses examined without having to take time off from their normal employment. However, not all services will be available at this time due to limited staffing. Please call the office for more information.

WHAT'S NEW

As always we have made a concerted effort to make ourselves "smarter" this year:

- Dr. Rubie attended a seminar concentrating on Equine Reproduction (*imagine that?*) this past December in San Diego, California.
- Dr. Shaarda attended a seminar in Ohio that focused on neonatology and pediatrics.
- Our technicians Erin Weaver and Lindsay VanOtteren attended a weekend short course at Virginia Tech with varied topics from endoscopic techniques to pain management and primary nursing care.
- As for myself, I just recently attended a weekend short course at The Ohio State University on the diagnoses and treatment of varied "horse head ailments".

One of the things I was made aware of at my seminar is a new therapy for "ear warts", better known as *aural plaques*. Since my wife's horse "Martin" is currently afflicted with this condition, I decided that he could be my guinea pig for this new product. I'll be sure to let you know about the results in the future.

It has always also been a goal of ours to make our clients "smarter" by providing an annual client education seminar every January. This year was no different than previous years. We had a great turnout of approximately 230 attendees. Lucky for us the weather behaved and allowed for safe travel. The subject was Equine Metabolic Syndrome presented by Dr. Hal Schott from Michigan State University followed with Dr. Judy Reynolds discussing proper feeding of horses with this affliction. We decided on this topic because of its correlation with the multiple laminitis (founder) cases we've treated this past year.

I would like to take this opportunity to brag a little. We decided to enter a float in the annual Lowell Christmas Parade this past December. The topic of the parade was "Green". As many of you may know, our receptionist Joyce Hofman is a very creative individual, and made a couple of horse heads along with a Cindy-Lou Who, out of old plastic shavings bags. I constructed a barn façade from some old 2x4's and plywood so as to have shelter for the two horses. We placed a steel model horse complete with saddle and reins which I rode, and covered the whole thing with flashing Christmas lights! Dr. Rubie pulled us down the parade route with her vet truck, also decorated with flashing lights, and a set of moose antlers (thanks to Brian Pelham) on the grill. In spite of freezing cold temperatures and wind chill, we were awarded third place out of about 20 floats.

Many of you are probably not aware of the fact that we offer a \$1000.00 annual scholarship to a Kent County senior 4-H member that meets a list of strict criteria: including grades, aptitude, experience both in and out of 4-H, and an interview. We feel that it is a way that we can give back to the horse community in Kent County. This year the award was presented to Miss Marlena Barkow, daughter of Andy and Marlynn Barkow of Cedar Springs. Marlena is attending Black Hawk College in Illinois, majoring in chiropractic medicine. It is her goal to be able to provide chiropractic services to horses, once she has finished her education. As the individual who ultimately decides on the winners of this scholarship, it is one of the most difficult things I have to do every year! There are so many deserving applicants, but there can only be one winner. If you or someone you know may be interested in applying, please contact the Kent County Extension Office or your Kent County 4-H horse leader.

WHAT DO MY HORSES NEED?

The American Association of Equine Practitioners (AAEP), our umbrella organization, has published their recommendations for "core" vaccines. They are: Eastern & Western Encephalitis, Tetanus, West Nile, and Rabies. You can read more by clicking on their web site: www.aaep.org. Our recommendations for our specific area include all of these with the addition of Potomac Horse Fever. To see our full set of recommended vaccinations, I encourage you to visit our web site at: www.equinemedical.com, on "the things you should know" page. As an aside, we also have a link on the first page of our web site that you can print and use to help us send accurate information to the lab for your Coggins testing. Please take the time to fill this form out, as it greatly helps us in expediting your Coggins!

Once again I would like to take a moment to discuss parasitism (worms), a topic that is becoming more and more important as time passes. It seems that we are treating an increasing number of clinical cases (diarrhea) in our hospital diagnosed as having parasitism. I think that there are a couple of reasons for this.

As the amount of land available to pastured horses becomes less, their concentration inevitably increases. That increased density of horse's results in overgrazing and increased contamination by manure. As the

increased amount of manure per square foot of pasture increases, so does the likelihood of parasitism within the herd. First off, it is believed that for far too long, horse owners have relied upon paste dewormers as their only means of parasite management. Even though the dewormers that we have today are extremely effective in killing parasites they are much more effective when used appropriately. The analogy I like to use is this: If we compare the dewormer (ivermectin) to a machine gun nest, and the parasites to the opposing soldiers (manure), no matter how powerful the machine gun is, it can be overcome if enough opposing soldiers rush the gun's location. The point is that to get the best effect from the dewormer, one needs to reduce the exposure to manure. Thus it is imperative that pastures are maintained to reduce the overall numbers of parasites. One way to do this is to physically remove the manure from the pasture. This method is used in Kentucky by the large breeding farms. Another way is to drag and mow the pasture periodically (2X per week) to break up the manure, allowing the sun to penetrate and desiccate the larvae that are within the fecal balls. In northern climates such as ours, the number of infective parasites on pastures increases seasonally from spring (May), peaks at mid-summer, and then decreases in autumn. It is also known that the infective parasites present in late autumn can survive on the pastures for the entire winter. The point that needs to be made is that dewormers are only effective when incorporated into a complete program.

Another interesting fact is that often there is one horse within the population that is for one reason or another, able to harbor a significant larger number of parasites than his counterparts, in spite of being on the same deworming program. What this means is that somewhere within your herd there is probably a horse that is acting as the primary source for reinfestation for the rest of the horses. To truly have an effective parasite prevention program, these individuals need to be discovered through fecal exams, be appropriately treated, and then retested 2 week post-treatment to ensure appropriate response. Once the major source of the parasites is identified and treated, the amount of paste wormer purchased for the rest of the herd can be substantially reduced.

It must also be noted that for a deworming program to be truly effective, all horses within the same pasture need to be dewormed concurrently. To only deworm a couple of horses and then turn them out onto a potentially contaminated pasture defeats the whole purpose of deworming them in the first place. It is only the adults within the horse's GI tract that produce eggs, and thus the infective stage of the parasite on the pasture. The primary goal of deworming is to kill the adults, thus reducing the overall shedding of eggs and infective larval stages which are later ingested on top of the grass. During the right weather conditions, i.e. hot and humid days, the larvae (infective stage) will die quickly by metabolizing all of its energy stores before being ingested. Under optimal conditions the pasture can become "clean" in as little as 8 weeks. If all the horses within a pasture are all dewormed concurrently, killing the adults, and the entire infective larvae die due to energy depletion, the parasites life cycle has been severely compromised. The ultimate goal is to reduce our dependence upon chemicals to manage our horse's welfare and emphasize management practices instead. The bottom line is this: no matter how frequently you are deworming your horse, the only method by which we can determine if you are being successful is to perform a fecal test on each of your horses.

DR. BUNN'S SOAPBOX

I would like to take a moment to discuss what I feel is one of the greatest threats to a horse's wellbeing that I encounter. It is a problem I experience every day, more often in the winter months and it can make the difference between a poor outcome and an optimal outcome in the very least; life and death in the most serious situations. Sounds dramatic? Important? It is. The scourge which I am referring to is the availability and ability of trailering horses. It is probably my greatest frustration, especially when I know that most horses are trailered frequently for exhibition purposes, but when it's necessary for them to be transported to a facility where they can get appropriate diagnostic work or therapy, the trailer is either non-functional or buried in a snow bank! I feel that all horses need to readily load into a horse trailer safely and be trained well enough to do so without calling the Michigan National Guard for assistance. It's

a matter of fact and not opinion, that most procedures, other than routine immunizations, can be better performed more thoroughly and safely at an equine medical facility. All the equipment is readily available as well as the whole support staff. I know for fact that the wounds I suture in the clinic during the winter, by which I can feel the tips of my fingers, fair much better than the ones I suture at someone's farm whereby I can not feel my fingertips! This also holds true for those cases with serious colic. For every minute or hour it takes to dig out and hook up the trailer or load your horse, the prognosis for a successful outcome is significantly compromised. If you need help in training, contact our office; we would be happy visit your farm, evaluate the safety of your trailer, and discuss "humane" methods for training.

HOUSE KEEPING

It is greatly appreciated when you have your horses caught or stalled when our doctors arrive. Not only does this help us in our attempts to being prompt to our appointments, but it also helps us in our efforts to get home to our families at a decent time!

Have a great spring!

Jeff Bunn DVM
Linne Bunn

Stephanie Rubie DVM
Lindsay VanOtteren

Todd Shaarda DVM
Joyce Hofman

Erin Weaver
Dixie Harvey