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15 April 2016

The Agriculture and Environment Committee Hendra Vaccine Inquiry
C/- Mr Rob Hansen
Parliament House
Brisbane
Queensland 4000
Phone: 07 3553 6660

By email: robert.hansen@parliament.qld.gov.au

Dear Mr Hansen,

RE: Veterinarian Submission to Hendra virus Vaccine Inquiry

My name is Dr Gillian Burns, and I am a veterinarian located in Sydney, NSW. I have been in veterinary practice for 27 years. I have worked in USA, New Caledonia and Australia as a veterinarian treating a wide variety of species. I am currently undertaking a research PhD at the University of Sydney and have my own private practice near my home.

I wish to address the following Terms of Reference in the Qld Parliament's Hendra virus Vaccine Inquiry:

- The incidence and impact of adverse reactions by horses following vaccination and the reporting of adverse reactions and economic impacts of the Hendra vaccine.
- The development, trials and approval processes of the vaccine
- Who bears the risks of HeV infection and who incurs the costs and receives the benefits from each risk mitigation option.

My practice is part-time as I work towards specialist status. I have vaccinated most of my clients' horses, leading to approximately 50 horses vaccinated at least once and most vaccinated regularly. To date, I have had 1 horse react with soreness to the neck. This resolved quickly with topical medication.

The Hendra vaccination is similar to the Rabies vaccination in the USA. It is a rare but catastrophic disease. Rabies was once endemic in the USA but is now mostly controlled, and it is very rare that a dog catches rabies. This is due to a vaccination and tagging requirement. Even dog owners who will get no other veterinary care for their pets will get the Rabies vaccination yearly. The big difference between the Rabies vaccination and the Hendra vaccination is the cost. The Rabies vaccination is offered at a very low cost to the owner. This is due to market size as the number of dogs in the USA is very large.

Hendra, however, affects a very small number of animals. Because of this and the cost of managing horses through the testing facility, the vaccine is quite costly to produce. Compare the cost of the Rabies vaccine at US\$25.00 every three years to the cost of the Hendra vaccine at AU\$90.00 every 6 months. It is one reason people have rejected a required vaccination.

When you look at efficacy, safety and reliability of the vaccination, we should commend those veterinarians involved in its development. The work was done quickly and thoroughly to produce a great vaccination that has this far proved 100% reliable. It is unfortunate we cannot tell how many vaccinated horses DID NOT catch Hendra because they were vaccinated.

Any horse owner who has experienced the devastating effects of Hendra infection in their horses will speak of the emotional trauma involved. Any veterinarian exposed to a positive Hendra case will tell of the stress and distress of waiting to hear the outcome of testing. If a veterinarian is exposed to a horse positive for Hendra, even with full PPE, he or she will wonder if they are safe themselves. They will go home to their family wondering if they are exposing their children to the Hendra virus. Why should they have to put their family at risk because an owner refuses to vaccinate their horse?

No-one should be required to put themselves or their family at risk of a deadly illness. Veterinarians have every right to protect their families. The veterinarian has a right to choose whether they undertake the labourious task of full PPE to see a sick horse. Every veterinarian has the right to choose NOT to see a sick horse that might have Hendra disease. The owners make their own choices and the veterinarian should not suffer due to someone else's choice. The veterinarian has the right to choose too.

Being called out to a "sick" horse that has not been vaccinated in Sydney still worries me. A horse showing ANY of the many Hendra signs can be a concern. Hendra hasn't shown up in horses in Sydney YET but the disease is in the bats here. I believe it is only a matter of time...

One more thing I would urge the committee consider is this: that social media has changed the way information is passed around. It is no longer "expert opinion" which carries weight but rather "popular opinion". Popular opinion is not always right.

Yours sincerely,

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