

21 April 2016

The Agriculture and Environment Committee Hendra Vaccine Inquiry
Parliament House
Brisbane
Queensland 4000
By email: aec@parliament.qld.gov.au

Dear AEC Committee Members,

RE: Submission to the Qld Parliament's Hendra virus Vaccine Inquiry

I am an equine veterinarian, graduated 15 years and have completed a fellowship training program in Equine Medicine currently studying for specialist registration. I have practiced in Townsville in a primary accession and equine referral practice for over 10 years. I have worked in practices which have attended positive Hendra cases, and have instigated Hendra vaccination policies for treatment of sick animals.

I wish to comment on the term of reference below:

Whether the guidelines/procedures required for veterinarians attending horses that are not vaccinated against HeV are proportionate to the consequences;

Having read the AVA and Queensland Health guidelines many times and sat in forums where they have been discussed, I feel that the guidelines themselves are ambiguous and open for interpretation. This results in one veterinarian's interpretation and therefore future risk assessment and procedures not being in agreement with another person's interpretation, be that of another veterinarian, Queensland Health or WHS officer. This in turn leaves the veterinarian open to litigation, even though they have believed to have followed the guidelines, to the best of their ability and knowledge, as has occurred recently. To my understanding, a conviction under the work place health and safety act, will prevent the person from obtaining government employment, gaining a blue card for children, etc.

The statement that all veterinarians should wear full PPE for each and every unvaccinated horse consult does not take in consideration ambient temperatures and risk of heat stress while wearing PPE, the individual reaction and unpredictability of the horse, the nature of each individual consult and procedures required and the rarity of the disease. Wearing PPE for every sick unvaccinated horse consult, would mitigate most risk, but not all as it has been shown that horses can shed the virus for up to 48 hours prior to clinical signs. The increased use of disposable PPE, as suggested for all HeV unvaccinated horses in the above guidelines, is environmentally unfriendly, increases health risks of the people wearing it and increases cost to the veterinarian and client.

Providing appropriate information and education to our clients on both HeV Disease and the use of PPE is necessary, but ideally should not be done at the time of consult of a potential HeV positive case. During that very stressful and emotional time, all of the information given is not processed or retained.

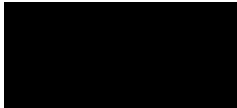
It is the job of the veterinarian to keep everyone present during a consult safe, be it with a fractious cat, aggressive dog or sick or poorly handled horse. We should as a profession then give advice on how to best proceed to manage the case after the consult with the welfare of both people and the

animal in mind. We should not, as a profession or individually, be responsible for the actions of people if they do not follow the advice given.

Another issue to consider, is due to the tyranny of distance, samples submitted on a Friday from some locations in Queensland will not have result until the following Tuesday, a time frame of 5 days. The shortest incubation period recorded for HeV infection is 4 days. This could render the negative test results useless if the horse contracts HeV whilst awaiting results.

Having worked as an equine veterinarian both before and after the introduction of the HeV vaccine I personally am prepared to treat any sick vaccinated horse to the fullest of ability. My risk assessment still includes other zoonotic and contagious diseases such as *Salmonella colitis* and *Streptococcus equi var equi*, both which require full PPE to be worn. I also treat sick unvaccinated horses. These horses will only get first aid and undergo no invasive procedures while awaiting the PCR results from Biosecurity Queensland, and as a result some have and will die during that time.

Yours sincerely,



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