

### Lower airway disease in horses:

Lower airway disease is defined as any disease occurring in the airways below the level of the larynx (the back of the throat). The main signs associated with lower airway disease are coughing, exercise intolerance and discharge from the nose. The two main causes of lower airway disease are Inflammatory Airway Disease (IAD) or Recurrent Airway Obstruction (RAO).

**Inflammatory airway disease (IAD)** is more commonly seen in young horses below the age of 7 who are in high levels of work. The condition is normally brought on by a combination of recurrent levels of high exercise, exposure to allergens in the environment and in some cases viral and bacterial infections.

**Recurrent airway obstruction (RAO)** - is most commonly seen in horses over the age of 7. RAO is caused by an allergic reaction to environmental allergens, most commonly these are fungi associated with hay and straw. RAO can also be caused by plant pollens which are at their highest during the summer months.

### **How lower airway disease is diagnosed**

The clinical signs of airway disease may not be present when the horse is at rest, therefore it is often best to examine the horse before and after exercise, lung function can also be tested using a rebreathing bag which is filled with air then placed over the horse's nose in order to exacerbate any lung sounds or breathing difficulties. The most effective way to evaluate horses lower airways is to perform endoscopy, this allows for samples of fluid present in the airways to be taken from the trachea (windpipe) and also the alveoli (the deepest part of the lung where gas exchange takes place). These samples can then be examined under the microscope to identify the type of inflammation present in the lungs.

### **Treatment**

Treatment will often consist of anti-inflammatory drugs that will reduce the amount of inflammation present in the lungs, these will often be combined with treatment that will dilate the airways to allow for fluid to be clear. The drugs may initially be given orally but can also be given using an inhaler to allow higher concentrations to reach the lungs. Additionally drugs that break down mucous will be given to help to clear the airways.

### **How can it be prevented?**

The majority of inflammatory airway cases can be controlled through environmental changes. Reducing the amount of airborne particles and dust in the horse's surroundings is an important prevention method. For example, changing bedding from straw to shavings and soaking hay before feeding or feeding haylage can improve the respiratory signs. Ventilation in the environment is also important in preventing airway conditions, ideally horses should be stabled in a different airspace from where bedding and forage are kept.

**New Vet**— We are delighted to welcome Ewan MacAulay to the team at Fairmoor Equine Clinic. Many of you will recognise or know Euan from 'seeing practice' with our vets. Euan will be starting towards the end of the month so please keep an eye out for him.

"My name is Ewan, and I'll be starting on the equine team in July after graduating from the University of Nottingham. I've lived in Northumberland all my life and look forward to continuing to enjoy this area, both inside and outside of work. I'm interested in all aspects of equine work, having ridden and competed in various disciplines from a young age, and I still enjoy riding my own horse as much as possible!



## Practice news

- Vets Lesley, Euan and Edward were all on duty at Alnwick Ford horse trials this weekend. Well done to Martyn Johnson and the whole team at Alnwick Ford for ensuring the ground was so good despite all the dry weather we have had.
- Well done to our trainee veterinary nurse Meagan Harmison who in June passed her final written exams on the road to becoming a full qualified veterinary nurse. All that is left now is her practical exams in the autumn
- We have now updated our new website with pictures taken of the whole team in action at our Fairmoor equine clinic.



## New Equipment:

We have recently acquired an Equinosis Lameness locator system that we can use to evaluate lameness and also measure the degree of improvement following nerve blocks and local anaesthetic joint infiltrations. The system works using sensors placed on the horse's head, pelvis and the right forelimb. A fourth sensor can also be placed on the rider for lameness which is more significant when the horse is being ridden.

## Gonçalo trip to Seattle

Gonçalo has just been to the 2018 Forum of the ACVIM, for the most recent updates on equine internal medicine. This provided a great opportunity to meet with fellow specialists from all over the world, see old friends and make new ones. There were many interesting topics discussed over these 4 days of training namely on diagnosis, treatment and prognosis of congestive heart failure in horses, urinary tract diseases, new medications being tested for treatment of equine metabolic diseases, newly discovered causes of neonatal foal diarrhea, as well as neuromuscular conditions. Particularly interesting was the description of a new technique in which cardiac ultrasound was performed from within the heart itself via a special IV catheter, or the results of a study on the safety of a technique used to collect cerebro-spinal fluid from a horse standing under sedation! Although some of these techniques are not yet available here it was great to see what is becoming possible in advanced equine medicine these days.

## Service promotions

**Gastroscopy**— We continue to offer a reduced price gastroscopy clinic every Tuesday. Gastric ulcers are a leading cause of poor performance and weight loss. The cost is £185 which includes the cost of sedation. The procedure normally takes around half an hour and we advise horses are brought to the clinic the night before so they can be starved for 12 hours beforehand.

**Weight clinics**— We are happy to come out to yards and offer free weight advice to all our clients. We are also happy to tie this in with any work that needs done on the yard such as vaccines and dental examinations. As part of this service we can offer thanks to MSD animal health, free yard master meetings with yard owners to discuss how together we can improve biosecurity on their yard.



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