

PREVENTIVE EQUINE HEALTH

THE Picture of Health campaign was launched at our XLEquine Spring CPD meeting in March.

The aim of this ongoing campaign is to bring together horse owners and their vets to help keep their horses fit and healthy. The CPD event covered important health care topics, such as dentistry, foot care, biosecurity, worming and the vet's role in antibiotics.

A survey by *Horse and Hound* (2015) suggested 62 per cent of horse owners use their vet as their primary source of advice about equine preventive health care. This begs the question, who or what are the other 38 per cent using?

Listen to any livery yard chat and we realise how seriously owners take their horses' everyday health. But we tend to hear "I saw on Facebook" and "I read on the internet", resulting in a staggering variety of "expert" opinions.

Equine vets ought to be top

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in the first of six reports, looks at XLEquine's Picture of Health campaign and how equine practitioners are able to benefit from a focus on the healthy horse

of the go-to list for all horse owners. Our clients want to avoid disease in their animals, and we have the tools to enable them to do it.

Prevention is better than cure

The XLEquine Picture of Health initiative reminds us to promote the medicine around the mantra "prevention is better than cure". We should be approachable, consistently helpful and, importantly, good value for money.

Plus, our aim should not be directed solely at meeting the needs of the individual, rather at achieving outstanding general health and welfare of the national herd.

Owners take many steps to ensure the good overall health of their horses, from regular vaccination against infectious diseases, quality foot care and nutrition, to routine dentistry and worming.

While vets are involved in some of these common management protocols, we may be missing out on contributing to others.

Who advises stud managers about their foal care, worming, quarantine and biosecurity programmes? Can we participate in discussions about saddle fitting and shoeing, or feeding and exercise plans?

Our clients need to know we are interested in every aspect of their horses' daily lives – that way, they feel valued and are more likely to be loyal customers, who perhaps even recommend us to a friend.

The XLEquine Spring CPD meeting saw members sharing their objectives for supporting everyday equine health and included the following examples:

- Encourage vaccination take-up by offering free health checks, targeted blood screening or discounted doses.

- While you're at the yard, provide complimentary teeth checks so you can follow up with quality dentistry.

- Create bespoke worming regimes for clients based on free worm egg counting, if the anthelmintics are purchased from the practice.

We are not in direct competition with many of the paraprofessionals out there, so opportunities to work with them should not be missed. Our combined skills are often necessary for successful outcomes, and a united front shows consistency and a desire to be involved in owners' daily management routines. Perhaps host a joint client evening with local farriers, nutritionists or physiotherapists, or even provide CPD for them.

Champion the cause

The whole practice should be inspired to champion the cause. Veterinary nurses run useful bandaging or weight clinics, and receptionists are the front line in advertising your policies. Advice must be up to date, relevant and delivered via different platforms if we are to make ourselves future-proof. After all, with the frightening increase in antimicrobial resistance, many diseases may become just that. Prevention might soon be the only option, as our "cures" start to fail.

Working together to build a Picture of Health

XLEquine



There will always be midnight colics, wounds of unknown origin and lameness workups to test the mind. It may be less glamorous, but if we allow good, honest advice to be the bread and butter of equine practice, "my vet told me" will be the words we hear on those livery yard lips.

Reference

Horse and Hound (2015). Online survey emailed to *Horse and Hound* database (23-30 April), sponsored by MSD.

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