

# EQUINE DENTISTRY IN YOUR PRACTICE

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in the second of six reports, discusses the benefits and opportunities of offering dental services for horses

**HUGE advances in equine dentistry have occurred in recent years, in terms of understanding anatomy and physiology, and techniques and equipment. You only have to look at the amount of studies being carried out to see equine dentistry is becoming "trendy" again.**

Any practice not providing a comprehensive equine dentistry service is missing out on an important revenue stream. At Fellowes Farm Equine Clinic, we invested in comprehensive equipment for our vets and started providing modern equine dental services a few years ago. Equine dental services now account for a significant percentage of our monthly turnover. Investing in training and new toys has allowed us to focus on delivering best practice to clients, using the latest techniques and equipment.

Whether a GP carrying out dental work, or developing this as a main interest area, having the right equipment – such as a good-quality mouth speculum (minimum of four hand floats); a good LED head torch; a dental mirror; a periodontal and occlusal surface probe; and a horse head stand – is an essential starting point.

The acquisition of a modern motorised dental unit is worthwhile if you hope to

compete with the qualified equine dental technicians (British Association of Equine Dental Technicians; BAEDT members) and provide performance floating as a service.

The next point to remember is, as vets, we are the only ones qualified to give sedation. Many owners, especially those who often use an equine dentist, consider this an unnecessary cost when it is feasible to perform their horse's dental work without sedative drugs on board. Clients need to be aware it's not necessarily about their horse being "badly behaved", it's more a case of giving the horse (and owner) a better experience.

In the author's opinion, if you can persuade clients to have their horse's dental performed under sedation, they are so impressed by the thoroughness and ease of the procedure, they would not have it done any other way in future.

Many say the dental is less stressful for them, as well as their horse. A headstand and dental mirror allows you to show clients pathology you spot and involving them will bond them to your service.

As dentistry is a developing area in many practices, especially with the appearance of various dental qualifications, it is inevitable there will be a range of expertise delivered

to – and experienced by – clients. It is important to agree in the practice who will be providing equine dental services to clients – will it be all your vets or a specific dental team?

It is vital some consistency is experienced by clients and, if someone in your practice has an equine dentistry interest, you could suggest he or she organises internal CPD to impart skills on to others. With a free dental for grabs, clients will usually be happy to provide horses for this.

### External relationships

An area for a practice to consider is how to develop relationships with BAEDT members and non-qualified equine dentists. Does the practice want to work with them or go in competition against them?

If you have good BAEDT members in the area, perhaps it will be beneficial to build the relationship such that they do the routine work and send their referrals to you. Competing with them for routine work soon burns bridges and dries up what could be a lucrative referral stream.

It is also important to educate clients as to who can do what, as many equine dentists act outside the guidelines of BEVA/British Veterinary Dental Association category one, two and three procedures. For example, non-qualified equine dental technicians (EDTs) should not be using motorised tools and no EDTs should remove wolf teeth unless under the "direct and continuous" supervision of a vet.

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One way of building external relationships, such as with dentists and farriers, is to hold CPD evenings – beer and pizza, along with some quality CPD, always goes down well.

### Developing dentistry

A lot can be done to raise awareness of what practices can offer with equine dentistry. Receptionists and VNs making bookings for vaccination and yard visits can be trained to confidently suggest and offer free dental checks to clients. Your website and social media can also educate and differentiate what the practice and its dental team can offer.

Further qualifications to consider are the BAEDT, RCVS Certificate in Advanced Veterinary Practice (Equine Dentistry), RCVS advanced practitioner in equine dentistry and RCVS diploma. VNs can also become EDTs via the BAEDT and can be a great asset to the practice.

**RICHARD MEERS** is the third person in the UK to have obtained an

RCVS Certificate in Advanced Veterinary Practice (Equine Dentistry). An ex-Army vet, he spent a year in mixed practice, then joined Fellowes Farm Equine Clinic eight years ago. He became a director in 2013 and is to sit the British Association of Equine Dental Technicians exam in 2017.

