

ENSURING A BRIGHT FUTURE FOR EQUINE RESEARCH

On behalf of the Equine Research Coordination Group

In the past two decades, huge advances have been made in our understanding of many equine diseases. But we have a lot more to learn before we can truly improve the way many of these diseases are prevented or treated. One simply needs to consider the impact that laminitis had on Barbaro, a horse who captured everyone's imagination, or the effect that Equine Herpesvirus-1 infections have had up and down the East Coast in the past few months. While these diseases might be the most glaringly obvious at this time, they are not necessarily the most devastating to horses or the equine industry. Colic, osteoarthritis, neonatal septicemia, infertility, respiratory disease, laryngeal hemiplegia . . . the list of diseases needing attention goes on and on.

How are we going to address these diseases that threaten the health of our horses and the viability of the equine industry? How are we going to deal with new diseases and conditions as they arise? What are we going to do when diseases we thought were conquered suddenly reappear? More importantly, who is going to find the answers and solve these riddles?

This latter question is probably the most important and most pressing problem facing horse owners because it reflects an underlying problem in our country today. The simple fact is that fewer and fewer young people in the United States are pursuing careers in science. The situation is very similar in veterinary medicine, as the vast majority of new graduates choose veterinary practice, rather than considering careers in teaching and research. While renewed interest in post-graduate clinical training programs (internships and residencies) appears to be on the rise, these individuals are pursuing board certification to start careers as clinical specialists rather than careers as researchers. Unless there is a drastic shift within the next decade, science as a whole and specifically veterinary research as we know it risks extinction. This is particularly true at academic institutions where funding is not sufficient to support a career directed solely at equine research.

To address this situation in equine-related fields, we must recognize two things. First, research drives progress, and this cannot happen if we rest on recent successes. Over the past two decades, the expectations of our clients have risen dramatically and will continue to increase in the future. Second, we must take the steps necessary to make science attractive to the bright, young people in our schools, and especially to our new graduates. To do so will require both structured programs and money.

Educators and researchers need the opportunity to get more undergraduate and veterinary students actively involved in research so they can experience the excitement that accompanies new discoveries. In order to make research more attractive to new veterinary graduates, a high priority must be the establishment of new, well paying research fellowships for PhD and post-doctoral training programs. The salaries associated with these fellowships must keep pace with salaries paid by the National Institutes of Health to physicians in similar training programs. In the past, graduate students were plentiful and were able to pursue their training on relatively low stipends. Recently, though, stipends have not kept up with the rising cost of living, a fact that makes it easy for new graduates to choose more lucrative alternatives.

Furthermore, horse owners and equine-related industries must invest in equine research funding to enable investigators to develop research programs directed at diseases affecting the horse. Progress will only be made when there is sufficient support to establish research programs that have appropriately trained people and the technical resources needed to be successful in the

competitive environment of research. A career in research now has to be both exciting and rewarding; one out of two will no longer work.

The equine veterinary community needs your help in this endeavor. Donations to the Morris Animal Foundation (www.morrisanimalfoundation.org), Grayson Jockey-Club Research Foundation (www.grayson-jockeyclub.org), American Quarter Horse Foundation (www.aqha.com/foundation), American Association of Equine Practitioners Foundation, Inc. (www.aaepfoundation.org) or your favorite university with a college of veterinary medicine will help support new equine research fellowships and funding of research programs. And equine groups and industry representatives need make a concerted effort to influence state and federal legislators about the need for funding equine medical research.

Please contact the AAEP Foundation (www.aaepfoundation.org) for information about how to make donations for equine research, or call 1-800-443-0177 (within the U.S.) or 859-233-0147. This is just one of the many efforts that the AAEP is coordinating on behalf of the industry through the Equine Research Coordination Group (ERCG), which is comprised of researchers and organizations that support equine research. Organized last year with a mission of advancing the health and welfare of horses, the ERCG promoted the discovery and sharing of new knowledge, enhancing awareness of the need for targeted research, educating the public, expanding fundraising opportunities and facilitating cooperation among funding agencies.

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The ERCG is a group comprised of researchers and organizations that support equine research. Participants in the ERCG include equine foundations and multiple university research representatives. Current participants include: AAEP Foundation, American Horse Council, AQHA Foundation, Grayson-Jockey Club Research Foundation, Maxwell H. Gluck Equine Research Center, Morris Animal Foundation, Havemeyer Foundation, United States Equestrian Federation Foundation and University Researchers including: Noah Cohen, VMD (Texas A & M University), Greg Ferraro, DVM (University of California – Davis), Eleanor Green, DVM (University of Florida), Dick Mansmann, VMD (North Carolina State University), Wayne McIlwraith, BVSc (Colorado State University), Jim Moore, DVM (University of Georgia), and Rustin Moore, DVM (The Ohio State University). For more information about the ERCG, please visit online at <http://www.aaepfoundation.org> and click on the ERCG link.