

IVMA One Welfare Initiative

The Evolving Landscape of Equine Welfare

The landscape of equine welfare continues to evolve and is based in part on societal and cultural changes. This is due in large part to the advancement of technology and the fast-paced world of social media, where perception instantly becomes reality. In the midst of all the changes, lies the science of veterinary medicine. Where does this leave the horse?

At the American Association of Equine Practitioners (AAEP) Convention in November 2017, the AAEP Welfare and Public Policy Advisory Council met. The Council has been very active, assessing current and emerging equine welfare issues. Unlike a committee that is charged with a specific goal, the advisory council serves to lend their collective wisdom and guidance to the AAEP Board of Directors. The advisory council also has working subcommittees from time to time.

Such was the case during 2017, where a subcommittee was formed to evaluate the need for a comprehensive equine welfare summit. A recommendation to the AAEP Board of Directors was accepted, and in the spring of 2018, the AAEP will hold a facilitated equine welfare planning meeting with members of the Council, AVMA, and key opinion leaders.

Topics listed below demonstrate the breadth of issues impacting equine welfare that may require further review and discussion.

- Management of BLM/free roaming horses
- Working equids, to include carriage horses
- Disaster preparedness and relief
- Soring of the Tennessee Walking Horse
- Performance/sport horse issues, such as "fixing" tails/alteration
- Drug issues including training through pharmaceuticals and show and race day performance enhancing medications
- Controversial and potentially abusive training practices, including excessive loping/lounging to tire horses, excessive use of whips/spurs, harsh bits or excessive jerking on bits, extensive restraint devices on the head and neck, or inappropriate methods used during jumping training

Because of federal legislation that is re-introduced in every session of Congress, the topics of horse processing and horse transportation continue to be discussed, though currently no equine slaughter facility is operational in the US. Further, from a global perspective, the Council also evaluated what if any

role AAEP should play in global equine welfare issues, such as the extreme conditions of working equids in third world countries or the inhumane treatment of donkeys to support a donkey skin trade industry.

Finally, the Council also formed a standing state legislative subcommittee which monitors the introduction of bills that would have an impact on the equine practitioner. Many of these state bills, on the surface, represent an infringement on the practice of veterinary medicine, but they truly also represent a welfare issue to the horse.

These legislative issues that impact equine medicine in Indiana are monitored very closely by the IVMA Legislative Committee. Such issues in the past have included equine dentistry and equine massage. Dr. Bruce Whittle, an equine practitioner and leader in equine issues, will be speaking at the IVMA Annual meeting in March. Be sure to check out his Sunrise CE session on Friday morning, March 2, 2018 entitled "Pearls of Practice and the Veterinary Scope of Practice: What is the Big Deal?"

Despite the changing times, if we, as veterinarians, always do what's right for the horse, we can never go wrong.