



Preventative Measures: Medication Summit Review

By Guy Lamothe

“Preventative Measures” was the key concept to emerge from TOC’s Annual Medication Summit. Approximately 70 owners, trainers, veterinarians, track representatives, and regulators gathered in Del Mar on Aug. 16 for TOC’s Annual Industry Medication Summit, to hear nationally renowned experts discuss veterinary and medication issues of concern to California racing. Speakers and their topics included:

Alex Ardans, DVM, Director of the California Animal Health & Food Safety Laboratory System (*Post-Mortem Examination program and injuries*)

Rick Arthur, DVM, CHRB Equine Medical Director (*vets list procedures; confidential vet records and database; continuing education program; joint injection regulation; synthetic track surfaces; total carbon dioxide testing; anabolic steroids; out-of-competition testing; drug withdrawal times*)

Gary Beck, DVM, CHRB Veterinarian (*vets list procedures; confidential vet records*)

Jeff Blea, DVM, practicing veterinarian (*shockwave therapy; joint injection regulation*)

Steven Buttgenbach, DVM and Track Veterinarian (*Vets list procedures*)

Gregory Ferraro, DVM, Director of Center for Equine Health at UC Davis (*imaging techniques, infectious diseases*)

Craig Fravel, Executive Vice President, Del Mar Thoroughbred Club (*synthetic track surfaces*)

Marsha Naify, TOC Director (*disclosure of veterinary records*)

Harry Pellman, MD, TOC Director (*equine medical blue ribbon panel*)

Richard Shapiro, Chairman of CHRB (*total carbon dioxide testing; synthetic track surfaces*)

Wilson Shirley, TOC Consultant (*total carbon dioxide testing*)

Scott Stanley, PhD (*out-of-competition testing; EPO & steroids; total carbon dioxide testing*)

Kent Stirling, Executive Director, Florida HBPA (*drug withdrawal times*)

Thomas Tobin, DMV, PhD, Gluck Equine Research Center at University of Kentucky (*total carbon dioxide testing; EPO & steroids; drug withdrawal times*)

The tone for much of the day's discussion was "preventative measures" as a key to improved horse health and safety.

Whether present to hear the latest on Total Carbon Dioxide (TCO₂) testing, engineered track surfaces, or to join in the discussion of innovative means to prevent catastrophic injuries (including the potentially controversial disclosure of veterinary medical records) and use of on-track "standing" MRI imaging equipment, it was clear to attendees that the importance of these and other equine health issues continues to escalate. Similarly, it seemed all understood that the industry must adopt sound practices to advance and preserve the well-being of the horse and to promote fair competition and race integrity.

TOC President, Drew Couto, served as event moderator. Dr. Ardans, who oversees the Equine Post-Mortem Examination Program, reported that of more than 330 horses examined since inception of the program, over 90% of the fractures examined were associated with stress fractures present *prior* to a catastrophic event. He concluded that more efforts must be directed at early identification of stress fractures as an effective means of preventing catastrophic injuries. This set the tone for much of the day's discussion: preventative measures are a key to improved horse health and safety.

Dr. Arthur spoke about accessing confidential vets reports, a potentially controversial topic. As one of his primary goals, Arthur intends to create a statewide database of confidential veterinary medical records. One possible application of this database would be the regulation of joint injections. CHRB Chairman Shapiro, citing potential legal hurdles, nonetheless offered support for such a database, and suggested the industry cooperate with regulators to implement and support this effort.

Marsha Naify presented a persuasive case for the need to modernize equine care and adopt new attitudes about such care, including establishing a database of vet's daily reports and track vet procedures. She noted that owners often feel "left out" when it comes to knowing about and deciding what is administered to their horses. Moreover, given the expectation that owners will pay for such services and treatment, trainers and veterinarians should willingly make themselves available when owners have significant concerns about vet bills, medical procedures, the overuse of legal drugs, and the idea of tighter veterinary practice monitoring. Naify went on to propose greater transparency in veterinary records for horses involved in claiming races and auctions, which she feels is imperative to ensuring a clean and safe sport, and the improved and humane care of our horses.

"Milkshaking," the prohibited practice of elevating a horse's total carbon dioxide level through artificial means – usually the administration of alkalizing agents and bicar-

bonate "supplements" – remains a concern for many in racing, including Dr. Arthur, the CHRB, CTT, and TOC. Despite a precipitous drop in the number of violations since testing was implemented over two years ago, a small number of trainers continue to intentionally and adeptly milkshake their horses to levels *just below the violation threshold*. After public discussion of the issue, the perceived consensus of those attending was that there is a continuing need both to protect the betting public by eliminating the ability to alter a horse's performance through the use of such substances and practices, and to preserve a more level playing field for competing horse owners. Chairman Shapiro indicated the CHRB supports stiffer penalties, greater public disclosure, and complete transparency, as permitted by the law. Similarly, Dr. Arthur suggested a plan to implement an out-of-competition testing program as one more means to protect fair competition, the betting public's interests, and racing's overall integrity.

Shapiro provided an update on synthetic or "engineered," track surfaces, believed to be a key component of preventing injuries and preserving our horse inventory. Earlier this year, the CHRB passed a rule mandating that non-turf tracks at the "major meets" – those running four or more consecutive weeks – be comprised of these new engineered surfaces consisting of synthetic fibers, wax-coated materials, and underground drainage systems, by December 31, 2007. Shapiro was pleased to announce that Hollywood Park was ahead of schedule installing its new *Cushion Track* and expected to have it completed by early September 2006. Likewise, Del Mar is scheduled to begin construction in January 2007, once it receives approval from the California Coastal Commission. While MEC continues to research the various types of surfaces available for its two California race-tracks, it plans to install such a surface at Golden Gate Fields next summer.

In focusing on existing and emerging veterinary treatments and threats, attendees and expert guests discussed topics such as:

- Erythropoietin ("EPO") and Anabolic Steroids
- Drug Withdrawal Times for Penalty Guidelines
- West Nile and Other Viruses
- Shockwave Therapy

TOC expresses its sincerest gratitude to its guest speakers and all those who attended to make this summit one of the most successful ever. TOC is committed to working with other industry leaders for our horses' health and racing's integrity.