

Dear Editor

The proposed Veterinary Practice Regulation 2006 under the Veterinary Practice Act 2003 (NSW) is being pushed through and will terminate or dramatically curtail the work of many trades and para-veterinary professionals dealing with horses. Those affected will include farriers, masseurs, chiropractors and equine dentists. I wish to inform you of our association's response to the proposed legislation and how it affects our equine dentists.

Historically, the filing of equine teeth and tending to other oral disorders has been conducted by a variety of people, some were experienced and knowledgeable, many were not. Over the past hundred years or so there has been less and less veterinary involvement in equine dental treatment and public education. Indeed, a 2003 survey by the RIRDC contains ample reflections that highlight reasons why equine veterinarians had not pursued gaining equine dental treatment skills nor intended to pursue them in the future.

In recent times more veterinarians and so-called equine dental technicians have taken to updated power tools which require sedation. The introduction of power tools is often combined with expensive courses often lasting as little as 2 days or 2 weeks. This illustrates that there is money in the 'new age' equine dentistry. Some veterinary tutors proclaim ease of use, convenience and are even actively involved in marketing power equipment which suggests questionable ethics. Astonishingly it has been reported that as little as two minutes of power grinding without water cooling can irreversibly damage tooth pulp. (G. Baker, Uni of Ill.) Many trained dentists and more experienced veterinarians frown on the use of power tools and the sedation for every patient. There are currently 2 equine dentistry schools in Victoria and neither one advocates the routine use of power equipment or routine sedation. If they have to be used in certain cases, they must be water-cooled.

We need little debate about the substantial role a veterinarian can play in collaborative patient management. Much suffering of the horse is prevented when professionals in different fields work together. There are many examples that testify to the success of such 'patient comes first' processes.

The welfare of the horse must take priority. Legislation must provide a workable solution to facilitate those properly trained to be continuously scrutinized in the performance of their duties. The proposed legislation fails to safeguard horse welfare and is not a reflection of reality. The blunt 'all vets are trained to do teeth' leaves horses prone to become victims of the unskilled. We strongly support veterinarians who operate within the bounds of their knowledge; many of our members have built extensive networks with veterinarians based on exceptional horse care and professional respect. An Equine Dental Practitioners Board is being established which will govern the process of initial examination and the annual licensing of equine dental practitioners. It will ensure compliance with our strict Code of Practice.

We urge all horse owners and affected parties to voice their objections against this proposed Regulation to the NSW Department of Primary Industries or via our Association to [peter@equinedentalpractice.com](mailto:peter@equinedentalpractice.com)

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