



NEW JERSEY EQUINE CLINIC

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Mr. John Long,
Executive Director
United States Equestrian Federation
4047 Iron Works Parkway
Lexington, KY 40511

Dear Mr. Long,

I am currently a member of the USEF Drug and Medication Committee, past Chairman of the AAEP Racing Committee and a past President of the AAEP, member of the AAEP Task Force that drafted the "Clinical Guidelines for Veterinarians Treating the Non-Racing Performance horse," and current Chairman of the New York Task Force on Racehorse Health and Safety. I commend you on an outstanding Town Hall Meeting that you conducted this evening. I would respectfully offer the following comments and suggestions.

The USEF should be commended for its proactive efforts to promote equine health and safety. Your efforts demonstrate a clear understanding of the cultural and welfare issues surrounding the use of horses in competition in the 21st century. It is important for horsemen and veterinarians to clearly understand that the general public does not view medication in the same way as they do. The lens that the general public views medication is very simple. "Drugs are bad." What's more, drugs in sport are unacceptable, particularly in the case of drugs administered to animals who have no choice in the matter. The issue of stewardship is the key to this discussion. Whether you are talking about medication or prohibited practices, David O'Connor said it best when he said, and I paraphrase, that we need to ask ourselves the question: "Could I administer this medication or perform this practice in the public eye or on National TV and everyone would think it was acceptable?" That is an appropriate standard to judge our medication and practices in performance horse activities.

With specific regard to the first issue of GR843 Mandatory & cooperation of Horse/Pony Collapse or Death, I recommend the formation of a USEF Equine Safety Review Board, as has recently been established in New York Racing as a recommendation of the New York Task Force on Racehorse Health and Safety (<http://www.governor.ny.gov/assets/documents/Report.pdf>). This procedure is a useful tool to help accomplish the goals and support the principles you outlined during your Town Meeting. This review process places a stake in the ground that clearly declares that equine fatalities, however few, are not simply a part of our sport to be taken for granted. Convening an Equine Safety Review Board proceedings in the event of an equine fatality is an educational process first and foremost. By reviewing the circumstances surrounding or leading up to an equine fatality,

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knowledge can be obtained to help prevent fatalities in the future. Secondly, in cases where unacceptable behavior is identified, corrective or regulatory action may follow. The recommended protocol for conducting an Equine Safety Review Board proceedings is outlined in Exhibit I of the Task Force report referenced above. If you would like to discuss this program in greater depth, please do not hesitate to contact me.

The larger question that concerns the medication discussion during the Town Meeting is “What is the appropriate use of medication in the performance horse? One useful way to discriminate between the appropriate and in-appropriate use of medication in sport is simply this: “Is the administration of this medication based upon the health needs and welfare of the horse, or is the medication being administered in order to influence the outcome of a performance event? The former justification is, of course, a welfare-based procedure, the latter is not and deprives honest competitors of a level playing field. Put another way, medication administered to horses that is based upon entry date or time of competition rather than legitimate health considerations is generally NOT in the best interest of the horse.

For the past 4 years, the AAEP Racing Committee has been researching and addressing the many concerns inherent with the owner-trainer-veterinarian relationship. This is a work in progress, but I believe we are making good progress in defining the problems and proposing solutions to the challenges inherent in this “triangular” relationship. A common thread in our discussions is a need for transparency in this relationship and the need for all members of this relationship to be on the same page in terms of medication philosophy for the welfare of the horse. I expect that these core concepts apply similarly to the USEF disciplines with regard to equine welfare.

I will offer an infallible standard for equine organizations recommended by another AAEP Past President, Dr. Jim Coffman during an address that he made to the AAEP membership in 1986: “Whenever a question is answered based upon the welfare of the horse, the human principles involved are also best served in the long run.”

Again, my compliments on a great USEF initiative to openly address these extremely important issues in performance horse competition. I look forward to further progress by the USEF in this area and am pleased to offer my assistance.

Respectfully,

Scott E. Palmer

Scott E. Palmer, V.M.D.
Cc: Dr. Kent Allen