



## media *release*

Wednesday 27 August 2014

### **3,000 HORSE & PONY OWNERS NEEDED TO PARTICIPATE IN FIGHT AGAINST LAMINITIS**

More than 3,000 horse and pony owners are needed to collaborate on a new web-based research project, named 'CARE (Creating Awareness and Reporting Evidence) about laminitis', that aims to help all horse and pony owners reduce the threat posed by equine laminitis.

The four-year study, being undertaken by the Animal Health Trust (AHT), in partnership with the Royal Veterinary College (RVC), and generously funded by World Horse Welfare, is being conducted by PhD student, Danica (Dee) Pollard, based at the AHT. It will take a closer look at management factors which may contribute to the development or recurrence of laminitis within the British horse and pony population.

Dee said: "This is an exciting opportunity for equine owners in Britain to actively take part in scientific research and contribute towards a study that seeks to improve the health and welfare of British equines. We need input from as many owners as possible, so please register your animal(s) today. Each and every horse and pony is an eligible candidate and can join the study, regardless of past or present health status."

This study builds upon previous research conducted by Dr Claire Wylie, also funded by World Horse Welfare, where factors including rapid weight gain, increasing time

since last deworming, box rest in the previous week and new access to grass in the past month were shown to increase the risk of laminitis in horses and ponies. Dr Wylie's study also revealed that other factors such as transport in the previous week and the feeding of supplements were associated with reduced laminitis occurrence.

Collectively, these factors are of particular interest to the new study because they are all modifiable, and can be changed by the owner. Through modifying these contributing factors, it is hoped that horse owners can greatly reduce the significant welfare impact of this debilitating disease.

### **Benefits for horse owners taking part:**

- As collaborators in this study you will:
  - o Actively contribute to research aimed at improving the health and welfare of all British horses and ponies
  - o Receive access to information and articles relevant to horse health
  - o Learn how to accurately estimate and monitor the weight of your horse/pony
  - o Have access to monthly records of your horse/pony for future reference
  - o Be given the chance to have your horse/pony as the 'Featured Equine' on the website
  - o Have the chance to win great prizes from our sponsors
  - o Feel good about helping researchers better understand the triggers of this debilitating disease.

### **How horse owners can help**

Through the dedicated website, Dee Pollard and the 'CARE about laminitis' team aim to recruit more than three thousand horse and pony owners throughout Britain, in order to get a representative sample of the population and allow application of the study results to real-life situations.

Dee explains: "We need owners of **any** horse or pony, regardless of whether or not they have a history of laminitis, to register their animals and complete a detailed online baseline questionnaire. This will provide general information about their animal, their management and previous and current health."

Sections covered in the initial baseline questionnaire include:

- General information about your horse/pony
- Turnout and management of grazing
- Stabling and indoor environment
- Feeding
- Exercise
- Transport
- Hoof care
- Health management and recent health history.

Owners will subsequently be asked to review previously submitted information on a **monthly** basis, documenting any changes to the management routine or health of their animal(s). Owners will also be required to report any episodes of laminitis in their horses/ponies via an online reporting form. Information from the registered cohort of animals will be collected over a two-year period. Capturing changes in the animal's environment as they happen, and the occurrence of laminitis, will create a timeline of events, increasing certainty that exposure to a factor actually contributes to laminitis occurring or not occurring.

Dee states: "It is essential that we gather a large amount of data on individuals that will and will not develop laminitis, so that we can compare the two groups and establish whether the laminitic animals were more or less likely to be exposed to certain factors when compared to those that never developed the disease."

Dr Kristien Verheyen, Senior Lecturer in Clinical Epidemiology at the RVC and a member of the 'CARE about laminitis' study team, adds: "This is a fantastic opportunity for horse and pony owners to be at the forefront of equine research and actively contribute to a collective 'team effort' to reduce the serious welfare consequences that laminitis has on our animals. Our previous laminitis studies have highlighted some novel factors that seem to be associated with the disease and it is crucial that we now build on these findings so that we can provide firm recommendations for management strategies to reduce the risk of laminitis in *any* horse or pony."

The main aims of this study are to:

- Estimate the frequency of owner-reported laminitis, including both horses that are diagnosed by a vet and those that aren't – thus we will know the impact this disease has on our animals
- Further investigate factors which increase or decrease the risk of an animal developing laminitis, especially focusing on factors relating to management that can potentially be changed by owners
- Provide owners with evidence-based guidelines that will reduce the impact of laminitis nationwide.

Currently the veterinary-reported frequency of laminitis in Britain, estimated between 2009 and 2011, shows that active episodes of veterinary-diagnosed laminitis occurred in nearly 1 in 200 horses/ponies registered with veterinary practices, and accounted for nearly 1 in 200 equine visits.

"However an overall lack of studies into the frequency of laminitis leaves little to compare these estimates with," explains Dee.

Roly Owers, Chief Executive at World Horse Welfare, said: "Laminitis is a devastating disease of equines that causes massive welfare issues all year round. This is why World Horse Welfare is continuing to invest in vital research to better our understanding of the contributing factors to laminitis and the recurrence of clinical signs. To do this we need the help of horse owners through contributing to online diaries and logging their individual horse management practices and recording any change – this will help identify what does or does not contribute to the development or recurrence of laminitis.

He continues: "Laminitis is a very complex disease and it will take a herculean team effort to help tackle it. That is why we are asking all horse owners to jump on board with World Horse Welfare, the Animal Health Trust and the RVC to participate in this fight against laminitis. The time you devote to this study could have profound benefits not only for your own horses but for horses everywhere."

Horse owners interested in taking part in the 'CARE about laminitis' research project can register at [www.careaboutlaminitis.org.uk](http://www.careaboutlaminitis.org.uk), or for more information email [danica.pollard@aht.org.uk](mailto:danica.pollard@aht.org.uk).

## Ends

### **For further information, please contact:**

Farrah Stevens, AHT press office, 01638 555602

### **Additional notes:**

- The Animal Health Trust (AHT) is an independent charity, employing over 200 scientists, vets and support workers. It aims to improve the health and welfare of horses, dogs and cats through research. It also provides specialist referral services and continuous education to vets. Visit the website at [www.aht.org.uk](http://www.aht.org.uk).
- The Royal Veterinary College (RVC) is the UK's largest and longest established veterinary school and is a constituent College of the University of London. The RVC offers undergraduate, postgraduate and CPD programmes in veterinary medicine and veterinary nursing and is ranked in the top 10 universities nationally for biosciences. It is the only veterinary school in the world to hold full accreditation from AVMA, EAEVE, RCVS and AVBC.
- A research-led institution, the RVC ranked as the top veterinary school in the Agriculture, Veterinary and Food Science unit of the most recent Research Assessment Exercise with 55% of academics producing 'world class' and 'internationally excellent' research. The College also provides support for the veterinary profession through its three referral hospitals including the Queen Mother Hospital for Animals, Europe's largest small animal hospital, which sees more than 8,000 patients each year. <http://www.rvc.ac.uk>
- World Horse Welfare (Registered charity no: 206658 and SC038384), is an international horse charity that improves the lives of horses in the UK and worldwide through education, campaigning and hands-on care of horses. Since we were founded in 1927, our whole approach has been practical, based on scientific evidence and our extensive experience, and focused on delivering lasting change across the full spectrum of the horse world.
- In the UK our dedicated network of Field Officers investigate and resolve welfare problems, and we run four Rescue and Rehoming Centres where horses in need can receive specialist care, undergo rehabilitation and find loving new homes through our rehoming scheme – the largest of its kind in the UK. Our international training programmes alleviate the suffering of thousands of working horses by providing essential knowledge for horse owning communities in the

developing world. We also work tirelessly to change legislation and attitudes to horse welfare through campaigns and education, including our founding campaign to end the suffering endured by the tens of thousands of horses transported long-distance across Europe to slaughter each year. We support the responsible use of horses in sport, and are independent welfare advisers to the Fédération Equestre Internationale (FEI) and British Horseracing Authority (BHA). [www.worldhorsewelfare.org](http://www.worldhorsewelfare.org)