Horse owner understanding of equine gastric ulcer syndrome (EGUS)

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EGUS

• High prevalence across all horses

• TB racehorses >90% (Murray et al. 1996; Johnson et al. 2001; Ferrucci et al. 2003),
  endurance racehorses (race season) 93% (Tamzali et al, 2011)

• Sport and leisure horses 37 – 66% (Murray et al. 1989; Bertone 2000; Hartmann and
  Frankeny 2003; Nieto et al. 2004)

• Major advances in diagnosis, Tx and research in EGUS in last 20 years
Owner recognition of clinical signs?  
Impact on welfare?

Poor performance  reduced appetite  altered temperament – difficult to ride  bucking  refusing at jumps  weight loss  teeth grinding  colic  diarrhoea  crib biting  back pain
Therefore, we aimed to measure owner knowledge and attitudes to EGUS

Method

- Online survey, 15 structured Qs
- Distributed via horse-related social media sites
- Closed and likert scale Qs (SA, A, NA/DA, D, SD - NA/DA removed via to analysis)
- Mann whitney U analyses compared responses between owners who had experience with EGUS and those that didn’t (P<0.05)
Demographics: Owner age, experience / qualifications & role with horses

Causal factors
- Stabling
- Feed
- Travel
- Vaccinations
- Breed / genetics
- Medications

Signs / symptoms
- Girthing
- Coughing
- Performance
- Weight loss
- Behaviour: unridden/ ridden
- Colic
- Loss of energy
- Teeth grinding
- Bloods
- Coat quality
- Appetite

Info sources
- www
- Specific EGUS sites
- Forums
- Vet
- Other professional
- Friend
- Yard
- Coach / trainer
- Healer / alternative

Survey design
Results

Experienced n=556; no experience n=542
SEX: experienced: 98% female and 2% male
No experience: 99% female and 1% male
70% horse owners
Qualifications

- Qualification profile of both groups was similar <5% of each group having no qualifications

- 52% of experienced respondents were qualified below degree level compared to 41% in no experience group

- More of the no experience group possessed a degree or higher degree (54%) compared to the experienced group (45%)
Understanding of EGUS

Incidence of ulcers
Key factors that lead to ulcers

LOW FORAGE  HIGH CONCENTRATES  INFECTION
Diagnosis

- Both groups rated girthling, change behaviour when fed, aggression, anaemia, low WBC count, change in ridden behaviour as reliable indicators of EGUS.

- But EOs rated importance higher than NEOs (P<0.01).

- Both groups felt gastroscopy was definitive diagnostic tool.

- ER felt clinical signs were very reliable but NEOs only rated moderately reliable (P<0.03).
Treatment

- Both groups rated omepramazole as effective Tx, EOs also ranked sucralfate as an effective treatment, whereas NEOs did not (P<0.0001)

- Corn oil a common VS recommended Tx was not rated highly by either group
Information sources

EQUINE NUTRITIONALISTS, FEED COMPANIES

VETERINARY SURGEON

FRIENDS

INTERNET!

Google

facebook
EFFECTIVE owner decision-making equals... POSITIVE equine wellbeing (Williams and Tabor, 2017)
INSANITY: DOING THE SAME THING OVER AND OVER AGAIN, AND EXPECTING DIFFERENT RESULTS.
Take home messages

- Horse owners have a mixed level of knowledge and understanding of EGUS

- This knowledge appears to develop with experience of a horse with EGUS ➔ this could compromise welfare through lack of understanding

- Knowledge of client / owner perceptions and knowledge can allow VS to target specific client education on EGUS

- Horse owners want the best for their horses ➔ need to engage in education!
When you are on a great horse, you have the best seat you will ever have.

Winston Churchill

Thank you for listening
Any questions