

# Dukes Vet Practice

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## Practice news

We would like to welcome Sadie Parkinson who joined the practice in November as our credit control officer. Sadie has joined Linda in our office so many of you will speak to her now when you contact the office. Sadie is a keen horsewoman and among her horses has a 3 year old by our old stallion, Noble Shot, which she has been starting this summer. She is also a keen artist and does pet portraits in her spare time.

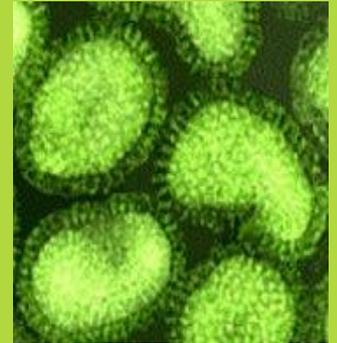
Sandra is now busy with her own riding centre and Western teaching and has finished working with us, leaving Jane to run the yard at the practice as well as organising our Christmas night out!

Linda is still very much in charge in the office and makes sure the vets are kept busy and organised – not an easy task a bit like trying to herd cats!

It's hard to believe that Hannah has been here for a year already and we stopped counting how long Mark has been here ages ago! All the vets have been kept busy this summer with a wide variety of interesting cases; a couple of diseases seem to have become more prevalent recently, "Equine Metabolic Syndrome" and Cushings Disease, possibly due to increased obesity and an ageing population. See Hannah's article overleaf for the latest on Cushing's Disease.

We've also been upgrading our other facilities including new dental equipment and a major upgrade to the lab meaning we can now freeze equine semen and will be offering this as a new service from January 2013!

## Flu Vaccination Amnesty In December



### FREE SECOND VACCINATION!

Equine influenza is not always given the respect it deserves, yet in an unvaccinated group of horses the effects of an outbreak are quite dramatic! Although not usually fatal in adult horses the disease spreads rapidly and affected horses are extremely sick. Most recover within a few weeks but some horses suffer for several months afterwards. It would appear that flu is rife in the UK at the moment with cases being diagnosed in the last few weeks in the Scottish Borders, County Durham, Herefordshire and Worcestershire.

With horses coming and going from Aberdeenshire all the time we are vulnerable to an outbreak. However modern flu vaccines have generally been very effective at preventing disease or minimising effects. We are currently using a recombinant virus vaccine. This takes a small part of the flu virus particle and adds it into another virus, in this case canary pox, which acts like a live virus to stimulate immunity but cannot produce clinical disease. Different strains of influenza are included in the vaccine to give better protection.

To ensure good immunity horses need a primary course of two vaccinations 4 – 6 weeks apart followed by a third dose about 6 months later then annual boosters thereafter. To help protect unvaccinated horses or those whose vaccinations may have lapsed we are giving the second of the two primary vaccinations for free to horses starting a vaccination course this December. To qualify you must book and pay for the first vaccine by 31<sup>st</sup> December 2012. All first vaccinations to be done by 15<sup>th</sup> January 2013.

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## New Dentistry Equipment

We have a special interest in equine dentistry at the practice and have always tried to keep up to date with the latest equipment and techniques.

The horse has a highly specialised mouth designed to chew and break down fibrous foods that we would starve if we tried to eat. To do this all their premolars and molars act as one continuous grinding surface.



View of the upper molar grinding surface with all the teeth functioning as one surface

Problems arise when, either due to overcrowding or too much space, gaps known as "diastemas" (diastemata) form between the molars. Food then packs down in to these gaps and becomes trapped.

The food starts to ferment and provides a substrate for bacteria to grow on, causing gum inflammation, pain and either difficulty chewing and swallowing, or sometimes major steering and communication problems when ridden.

In most of the cases we see the teeth are overcrowded and one molar becomes squeezed out of alignment. We have often found the best way to treat these cases is to remove the displaced tooth which is usually loose anyway because of chronic inflammation. These cases have generally done really well although they do need regular dental care afterwards to keep them healthy.

However recently we have come across a horse with true primary diastemata. Whilst removing a tooth would potentially solve the problem short term it would reduce the pressure on the other teeth potentially allowing further gaps to form. In this case we decided the best treatment was to widen the gaps by grinding a space between the teeth preventing food getting trapped and giving the horse time to hopefully close up the gaps as it matures. We now have a specialised diastema burr allowing this to be done. The horse will need ongoing further care but hopefully will improve with age.

## Equine semen freezing

We have been looking at freezing equine semen for a few years now but we didn't really have the right facilities to take in other stallions and there is a considerable equipment investment. However since building our new fertility unit this has been developed to provide a dedicated area where we can keep up to two visiting stallions at a time.

Jim recently went to visit Liverpool University's Leahurst Campus where they are currently researching the cutting edge of equine reproduction and then spent a day at Stallion AI Centre in Shropshire for a one to one masterclass with Tullis Matson on all aspects of Equine semen freezing.

We are just completing setting up the lab for semen freezing and will be doing some trial runs with our own stallion to ensure the system works. From January 2013 we will be able to accept stallions at the practice for semen freezing. Contact Jim for more details.

## What's new in Cushing's Disease?

Cushing's is one of the most common diseases affecting the hormonal system of horses and ponies, usually seen in animals over 10 years old. People also get Cushing's disease but although related the signs and treatment are different. Equine Cushing's is caused by gradual and progressive dysfunction of the pituitary gland located in the brain. An excess of a hormone called ACTH is produced which then stimulates excess cortisol hormone to be released from the adrenal glands.

Clinical signs in horses include: Abnormal hair coat, excess sweating, increased appetite, increased drinking and urinating, lethargy, laminitis, recurrent infections (e.g. sinusitis, abscesses.) and muscle loss.

We used to diagnose Cushing's using what's called a dexamethasone suppression test involving two blood samples 20 hours apart. However a new and more sensitive test allows us to measure the resting ACTH hormone level using a single blood sample taken at any time of day. Early diagnosis helps stop progression of the disease. Although there is no 'cure' with correct medical treatment in many cases clinical signs can be reversed within 12 weeks, and with improved monitoring and ongoing treatment plus good routine health care many horses improve and stay fit and healthy for years.