



Commentary: World Vet Year and the Horse

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The year 2011 marks the 250th anniversary of the so-called "modern" veterinary profession, and the United Nations has designated it as World Veterinary Year. An international slate of commemorative events has been assembled to help recognize the contributions that the profession has made to society in the quarter millennium since the acknowledged birth of veterinary medicine and surgery in France in 1761. The calendar can be viewed at www.Vet2011.org.

Recognition for the veterinary profession must be attributed to King Louis 14th of France, the visionary responsible for the great palace at Versailles. Those who have had the opportunity to visit the chateau might recall that there are two very large semicircular arrays of buildings facing the entrance to the palace. Although these are now used as offices, in Louis Quatorze's day they were the stables.

Concern for the health and welfare of horses led to recognition that there needed to be a more formal and progressive way of educating "horse doctors." Louis Quatorze's grandson, King Louis 15th, due to his desire to ensure that the horses in his court were as healthy as possible, suggested a school be created to train the people responsible for treating the many maladies that afflicted these animals. Louis Bourgelat is credited with creating the first "Western" veterinary school in 1761 in Lyon at the king's directive, and shortly after Bourgelat oversaw the opening of a second school that exists today in Alfort. As we know, in the intervening years the focus of the veterinary profession has expanded inordinately from that of hipposcience (study of the horse) to encompass the wide variety of disciplines that fall under the aegis of the profession today.

Nevertheless, the origins of the veterinary profession are rooted in care for the health and well-being of the horse, and it is therefore propitious that the 12th Congress of the World Equine Veterinary Association (WEVA) will be held this year for the first time in Asia, in November in Hyderabad, India. Asia has seen a rapid increase in its equine population in the last decade and an impressive surge in the use of horses for recreational purposes, so it is fitting that WEVA takes its premier event there. As best I can determine, this Congress will be the largest equine continuing education event to be held in this part of the world.

A WEVA Congress features state-of-the-art lectures from equine veterinary experts from all over the world. The Congress enables veterinarians from the region in which a Congress is held the chance to meet and converse with individuals who are the acknowledged leaders in their fields. WEVA's principal mission is built around the desire to advance the health and well-being of horses (yes, the same wording as I used in reference to the origins of veterinary science) worldwide by providing continuing education to equine practitioners in regions where it is not as readily available as it is in North America, western Europe, and Australasia, and it does so mainly by holding a variety of smaller educational meetings around the world during the two-year period between congresses.

It is interesting that in rapidly emerging societies such as those in India, China, and other parts of Asia, the practice of equine medicine and surgery frequently leads the way with respect to the introduction of modern equine medicine. High throughput and sophisticated companion animal practice that so many of us take for granted generally follows developments in equine practice. Therefore, it seems fitting that in this the 250th anniversary of a profession that arose from equine health concerns, similar concerns are again leading to new educational opportunities in places that have previously not had great exposure to them. WEVA is proud to be the facilitator of these opportunities.



Readers are cautioned to seek the advice of a qualified veterinarian before proceeding with any diagnosis, treatment, or therapy.

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