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Changing the Culture of Racehorse Medication

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Medication; the good



The appropriate medication and supplementation of racehorses is absolutely essential to maintain the health and welfare of the horse

Medication; the bad



The use of medication to mask pain or to compensate for constitutional weaknesses is bad for the health, welfare and safety of the horse and is bad for the breed in the long term

Medication; the ugly



When medication and ‘supplements’ are used to ‘get the edge’ (~ to enhance performance) it can get very ugly

The Culture of Pharmacological Enhancement



- Seeking a competitive advantage (an edge) by using chemicals is a deeply ingrained part of human nature
- Individuals seeking to win, by whatever means and at whatever cost, have undermined public confidence in sport for decades...it has to change.

What is Culture?



“A collective way of thinking; shared values and perceptions”

“The way things get done within the industry”

Desensitisation



- Industry insiders can become desensitised to accepted practices
- What is accepted as ‘the way we do things’ within our industry may be regarded as unacceptable by the majority of society

Can we change Human Nature?



Am I naïve, idealistic, detached from reality? Maybe but:

- Culture is based on values and beliefs
- If the values can be changed and the beliefs can be changed, the culture will change
- While education is important, a big stick is generally required as a persuader

What are the beliefs that need to change?



- *“Elite athletic performance comes from the end of a needle or a stomach tube or a miracle supplement”*
- *“If you are not pushing the envelope with drugs or supplements or dodgy ‘sports science’ to get the ‘edge’, you are not really trying”.*

What are the beliefs that need to change?



- *“If it’s not detectable, it is legal”*
- *“Everyone else is doing it so I have to do it to be competitive”*
- *“We ask so much of horses that we have to ‘help them’ cope with medication”*

What are the values that need to be developed?



- The safety, welfare and health of the horse is paramount
- The horse must compete on its individual and inherent merits

Rewarding Horsemanship



- Too often in our need and desire to ‘help’ horses (and ourselves) we try to substitute pharmacology for horsemanship to the detriment of the safety, welfare and durability of the horse
- We must systematically ensure that horsemanship, preventative medicine, patience and conditioning based on scientific principles will be rewarded
- A level playing field is the starting point

The Moral Compass of Medication Policy

The use of drugs to attempt pharmacologically adapt a horse to demands of the industry rather than adapting the demands of the industry to the physiology of the horse is ethically indefensible and counter-productive in the long term

Implementing change; define expectations



We can't expect compliance without defining what constitutes ethical and medically justifiable treatment of racehorses; what is good sports-medicine, what is enhancement, what is quackery?

Article 6 D of the IABR&W



Article 6 D of the International Agreement on Breeding, Racing and Wagering provides excellent principles and guidelines...in summary ;

- All medication must be administered in the best interests of the horse
- Horses must race free of the active pharmacological effects of all drugs including therapeutic drugs
- The use of performance altering substances in racing and training must not be tolerated
- All treatments administered to racehorses in training must be legally, ethically and medically justifiable



Australian Government
Australian Sports Commission

AIS Sports Science/Sports Medicine *Best Practice Principles*



AIS Human Sports- Medicine

Best Practice



- *“There is no role for injection of substances as a routine part of any supplementation program”*
- *“No substances should be injected into athletes except where the treatment of a documented medical condition requires such injection”*
- *“No injectable substances should be administered to an athlete by any individual other than a qualified medical practitioner”*

Implementing change; rules, regulations & policies



Examples of regulation –

- Separating ‘treatment’ and its effects from the day of racing as much as possible, for example, Racing Australia’s ‘one clear day’ restrictions on injections and stomach tubing
- Controlling the presence of ‘compounded’ or unregistered products in racing stables
- Compulsory regulatory education for trainers and veterinarians

Implementing change; education



- Very few professions do not require continuing education... why are horse trainers different?
- There is no formal education of racetrack veterinary practitioners in ethics, the consequences of their actions, the concept of social license and compliance with the rules of racing... why not?

Implementing change; enforcement



- Effective enforcement and deterrence requires a high probability of detection of wrong-doing
- Analytical testing of biological samples alone cannot deliver integrity or culture change. A total package of race-day, out-of-competition testing, medical record-keeping, auditing of medical records, stable inspections, licensing, intelligence and more is required
- Penalties for non-compliance must hurt

Controlling the 'enablers'



- Racetrack veterinarians and any number of 'sports-scientists', therapists and quacks support trainers and owners in attempts to push the envelope to obtain an 'edge'
- Licensing or accreditation of racetrack veterinarians?
- Controlling 'fringe' practitioners?

Are we succeeding?



- We must succeed; the long term sustainability of racing in a changing society is at stake
- We have the leadership and regulatory framework to achieve success but all participants must become champions of a culture that is based on the welfare of the horse and the integrity of racing.

Thank You