Small changes can make a BIG impact.
Embracing Sustainability in Equine Veterinary Practice

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In recent surveys, BVA 2019 and BEVA 2020, 89% and 95% of the veterinary profession respectively stated that they wished to play a more active role in the sustainability agenda.

The provision of human and animal healthcare has a significant environmental impact. ‘Healthcare without harm’ estimates that if global healthcare were a country it would be the fifth largest carbon emitter in the world. This means that we have an opportunity to make a meaningful difference, enabling our profession to play a role in creating a positive low-carbon future.

Our profession has a unique One Health perspective regarding the interplay between animal, human and environmental health, and the potential to be a leading force for sustainability, however it can be challenging to know how or where to start making changes. This is often because many things we do in clinical practice are governed by protocols or regulations established to optimise patient welfare and outcome, in addition to maintaining health and safety of the veterinary team. Changes made for sustainability do not need to compromise these standards, and there are many simple first steps that you can take to make a difference.

Key changes for sustainability in equine clinical practice:

RESPONSIBLE RESOURCE USE

Responsible use of resources reduces our environmental impact, preserves resources for the future and can bring cost savings. A simple, and yet key, change for veterinary practices is switching to a green energy provider and promoting a ‘switch off’ culture.

Performing an audit of your waste, both healthcare and domestic waste, can identify potential improvements in waste management (West et al., 2020). Appropriate segregation of non-contaminated materials which are suitable for the standard dry mixed recycling chain (e.g. cardboard, foil from suture packets, certain plastics) is facilitated by providing signposted bins in all relevant areas, and separate recycling bins in all practice cars and vans.

A large proportion of healthcare waste is plastic. The use of plastics in medicine has revolutionised healthcare: their material properties have allowed invaluable equipment to be developed, however plastics have an environmental impact.

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in their synthesis and disposal, or persistence in the environment. Optimising the way we use plastics in medicine is important moving forwards and we must consider the environmental impact of each device or product from “cradle to grave”, however increased recycling of medical plastics depends upon specific recycling programs being established via specialist recycling services. When you purchase equipment or consumables it’s important to ask your service provider about the sustainability credentials of their company or product, and the availability of recycling programmes.

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An appropriately rigorous segregation of the remaining healthcare waste, into offensive versus infectious or cytotoxic waste, minimises the quantity of waste that is incinerated. This ensures legal compliance as, in England and Wales, waste must not be incinerated if there is an alternative waste stream, along with reducing environmental impact and cost. Offensive waste streams may be managed as energy from waste, where this is available (West et al., 2020).

BE SUSTAINABLE IN YOUR OPERATION

Travel associated with activities of the equine practice or hospital can be rationalised to reduce carbon emissions. Could deliveries be reduced to every other day, rather than daily, for example? Could routine visits by an ambulatory vet be planned regionally, with appropriate diary planning, thereby saving time too? Yard days and zone visits are a good way to reduce carbon emissions.

A recent study showed that electric cars create 40% less carbon dioxide than petrol engines (BNEF, 2019) even when manufacturing is considered and the electricity used to charge the cars is assumed to come from coal. The carbon footprint of an equine vet will be considerably reduced by switching to an electric vehicle.

Consideration should be given to clinical protocols to ensure they are optimal, lean and efficient. Anaesthesia and the use of volatile anaesthetic agents, such as isoflurane and sevoflurane, has a significant environmental impact as they are potent greenhouse gases (West & Jones, 2019). Anaesthetic gas reclamation technology has recently been developed and is likely to be important in the future to minimise atmospheric pollution and contribution to global warming (Anaesthetic gas reclamation, 2020) and ensure resilience of clinical services provision.

USE MEDICINES RESPONSIBLY

Appropriate use of antimicrobials, including antiparasitic agents, is essential to mitigate the development of antimicrobial resistance. The use of selective deworming and routine use of faecal egg counts in equine practice provides a leading example of responsible medicine use within the veterinary sector. We have a vital role as veterinary surgeons to make decisions about the treatment protocols we choose and how we educate the clients about appropriate pharmaceutical use and disposal.

If you would like further advice and support on how your practice can embark upon their sustainability journey, Vet Sustain has released a free resource, the Greener Veterinary Practice checklist (www.vetsustain.org/resources/vet-practice-checklist). This checklist highlights simple steps to embed sustainability into your clinical practice. When implemented one step at a time, it is not difficult to do. We must all feel empowered to engage with sustainability: for the future of our planet and to ensure ongoing provision of outstanding veterinary care.

References

5. McGain, F., Hendel S.A., Story D.A. (2009) An audit of potentially recyclable waste from anaesthetic practice. Anaesthesia and the use of volatile anaesthetic agents, is essential to mitigate the development of antimicrobial resistance. The use of selective deworming and routine use of faecal egg counts in equine practice provides a leading example of responsible medicine use within the veterinary sector. We have a vital role as veterinary surgeons to make decisions about the treatment protocols we choose and how we educate the clients about appropriate pharmaceutical use and disposal.

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As a family owned company, Boehringer Ingelheim has always planned in generations. We are committed to developing sustainable solutions for the vets, animals and communities we serve. That is why responsible manufacture and disposal were key to the design of Aservo® EquiHaler®.

The Aservo® EquiHaler® combines sustainable materials, no greenhouse gas propellants, and a pioneering recycling programme, for sustainability at every stage.

Sustainable manufacture
The Aservo® EquiHaler® has been responsibly manufactured and the body of the inhaler has been made from up to 50% recycled materials (the regulatory limit).

Sustainable use
Our Soft Mist™ Inhaler is 100% propellant free. Medication is delivered to horses in a fine mist generated mechanically from a compressed spring in the inhaler – not from greenhouse gas propellants.

Reduced waste
Once your patient’s treatment is completed, the plastic components can be recycled with TerraCycle®. The product packaging is also plastic free and can be locally recycled.

Read on to find out more about the Aservo® EquiHaler® recycling programme.

References
Aservo® EquiHaler® recycling programme

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1. Register your practice at the TerraCycle website.

2. Look out for your recycling pack in the post.

3. Collect used EquiHaler®s at your veterinary practice.

4. Send them back to TerraCycle® for recycling.

Want to find out more? Go to: https://equihaler.uk/recycling

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