

TENNESSEE VETERINARY MEDICAL ASSOCIATION POSITION STATEMENT REGARDING EQUINE DENTISTRY

The Tennessee Veterinary Medical Association (TVMA) is dedicated to protecting the health and well being of animals within the state of Tennessee and is committed to advancing the science and art of veterinary medicine. With this in mind, TVMA adopts the following position regarding the practice of equine dentistry.

The practice of equine dentistry is an integral part of the practice of veterinary medicine as defined by the Tennessee General Assembly in T.C.A. §63-12-103(9). This statute, known as the Tennessee Veterinary Practice Act, includes within the practice of veterinary medicine to “. . . administer any . . . application or treatment of whatever nature for the cure, prevention or relief of any wound, . . . or disease of animals; [and] to perform any surgical operation on any animal;...” Just as treatment of dental diseases and deformities in humans should be performed by a licensed dentist or oral surgeon, treatment of dental diseases and deformities in horses should be performed by a licensed veterinarian.

The practice of “equine dentistry” by unlicensed persons has become more widespread over the past few years. In some states, state authorities have initiated enforcement actions to cease the unlicensed practice of veterinary medicine by these individuals. As a result, courts in other states have concluded that equine dentistry is within the practice of veterinary medicine. For instance, the Nebraska Veterinary Practice Act states, as does the Tennessee Act, that veterinary medicine includes the practice of veterinary dentistry. The Supreme Court of Nebraska found that a person who diagnosed possible problems with and changes in the condition of a horse’s mouth and treated, corrected and relieved defects, deformities, injuries or other physical conditions was engaged in the practice of veterinary medicine and had to be licensed as a veterinarian.

The American Association of Equine Practitioners states that equine dentistry includes the following: “Any surgical procedure of the head or oral cavity; the administration or prescription of sedatives, tranquilizers, analgesics or anesthetics; procedures which are invasive of the tissues to the oral cavity including, but not limited to, removal of sharp enamel projections, treatment of malocclusions of premolars, molars, and incisors, reshaping of canine teeth, the extraction of first premolars and deciduous premolars and incisors; treatment, extraction or repair of damaged or diseased teeth; periodontal treatment; and dental radiography are veterinary medical procedures and should be performed by a licensed veterinarian.” TVMA agrees with this statement.

Rules and Regulations of the Tennessee Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners allow veterinary medical technicians, veterinary student interns or employees of a veterinarian to float teeth of an equine without the physical presence of a licensed veterinarian so long as the employee was functioning under the supervision, control and responsibility of the licensed veterinarian (*Rule 1730-3-.10*) consistent with TVMA’s position that a licensed veterinarian must be clinically responsible for dental services provided to horses and have a previous veterinarian/client relationship established.

TVMA believes that the use of the designation “equine dentist” or any letters following a person’s name such as “Eq. D”, that would lead the public to believe that a person had veterinary training in the area of equine dentistry violates the Tennessee Veterinary Practice Act. T.C.A. §63-12-103(9) provides, that the practice of veterinary medicine includes the use of any words, letters or titles in such connection or under such circumstances as to induce the belief that the person

using them is engaged in the practice of veterinary medicine. Therefore, any person who is not licensed as a veterinarian but uses the designation "equine dentist" or the letters "Eq.D" after his or her name is practicing veterinary medicine without a license.