REPORT BY MAJOR D. H. WITHERINGTON ON THE VETERINARY SURGEONS MEETING (SECTION A)

SUMMARY

Interpretation of Rules of Racing & Interpretation of positive results

There was the suggestion that a copy of the national rules concerning the control of doping should be exchanged between the countries participating at this symposium. I consider this could best be dealt with by various secretariats and it could go as a recommendation from this symposium to the various secretariats of the racing authorities.

Clinical examination and reporting on the clinical or physical appearance of the horse which is subject to a dope test

It was generally agreed that the U.K. policy of submitting to the laboratory with each sample a brief clinical report on the horse's physical state both before and after racing could with advantage be copied by other countries. In brief the report veterinary officers put in would carry any suspicion they might have about the horse; position in the race, i.e. winner or beaten favourite; whether it fell and so on; whether it was in a depressed state or excited; whether it was sweating, salivating; and whilst one agrees this might be misleading in some cases we believe it can direct the analyst along the right line especially if the urine sample is small. Apart from the advantage of course to the analyst when examining the sample, this has a tremendous benefit to the stewards of the meeting, particularly if the horse has performed badly. We find very often there is a very good veterinary explanation for the horse's bad performance which has nothing to do with toxicology at all. For example in the U.K., although the examination is brief, we always auscultate the heart, examine the eye etc., all of these things we feel can be of use to the analyst.

Drug clearance times

Certainly in the U.K. one has very frequent requests from members of the veterinary profession to give some idea how long it takes a drug to clear. What they are really after of course is just how long can the drug be detected. The veterinary section of the meeting thought this a question that might be considered here as to the advisability or otherwise of distributing to veterinarians and other interested parties, a list of drug clearance times.

Packaging of samples

One of our delegates commented on the risks of possible tampering with samples which are conveyed in plastic containers and not in a metal box. For example a fine needle could be put through the side of such packaging and the sample contaminated by syringe. The Danish delegate commented that they have snap-on lids which is of course much simpler than the lead seals used in the U.K.

DISCUSSION

JAGGARD: Wouldn't clinical examination interfere with the identity of the sample, since we are not supposed to know where the samples come from?

CHAIRMAN: A caveat should perhaps be included that this should be done in a manner that does not disclose the identity of the horse in any way.

WITHERINGTON: We feel that the system used in the U.K. does not give away the identity of the horse.

BENAZET: With clinical examinations there are two different programmes, one made on the horse after a race concerning certain points as listed by Witherington and are official, and indicated to the analyst. There are then other medical questions that are only for the stewards.

WITHERINGTON: That information is not divulged to the analyst unless it would be of value. If you have an accelerated pulse, a cardiac irregularity, these would be mentioned.

BENAZET: The owner or trainer may protest.

EVANS: I am sure this question would be covered by professional ethics, and such information would not be divulged.
CHAIRMAN: I think we are agreed that this information should clearly not be divulged.

HENIGAN: I see a danger in that if we publicise clearance times, that information could be used against us in the case of a prosecution arising by the stewards. The connections could say — "but you told us that it would be cleared by x hours and we injected x hours minus y hours therefore we are in the clear".

CHAIRMAN: We do not intend to say if you give a drug within a certain time you will be safe, what we would say is, where information is scientifically ascertained with all the conditions of the experiment should there be any objection to this information being published and made available so that a practising veterinary surgeon may look at it and say under these conditions the drug was cleared in a certain time, and he may use this at his discretion. I think this is very different from the analyst saying — “if you give a drug after a certain time it will be safe”.

BLAKE: As our testing quality improves over the years we might find ourselves able to detect drugs for longer and longer.

CHAIRMAN: Again my view is there is a misunderstanding of the nature of the recommendation. We cannot say scientifically that a drug is cleared, it is a meaningless statement and depends on the method of test. What we can say is, in a scientific publication, that using certain criteria the drug was no longer detectable after a certain time, under these conditions of experiment. We cannot therefore go from this to a table of clearance times for use by the veterinary profession.

WITHERINGTON: It was the feeling of the veterinary meeting that this would be an indication to veterinary surgeons in practice, that if they stopped administration of a drug x days before, it would be clear.

SCHOTMAN: I have no objection to articles of this nature being published in scientific journals, but from what I have heard at this meeting, excretion studies have been done on stabled, standing, horses and I believe that these studies should be carried out on working horses to give correct excretion times, it is a most important point to make in any publication.

SMITH: Bearing in mind the possible use of this information, I think we should realise that clearance time is not constant. It depends on the age and sex of the animal and on the nature of the compound, those affecting the C.N.S. show dosage kinetics, and also we have heard of the presence of other drugs that can affect the rates. If one gives data of this sort, one would have to be very generous.

STEEL-BODGER: On the one occasion we, the veterinary profession, in this country took your advice, we added to it that this was the average and was advisory only and carrying no weight in a court of law.

CHAIRMAN: Could I say that I reflect the feelings of the meeting if I record that we should publish scientific information when it is available but we should not make firm recommendations for the use of veterinary surgeons, and therefore if it is published they must make use of it at their own discretion? We make no recommendations and imply nothing in the publication.

STEEL-BODGER: From the veterinary side vis-a-vis the analytical chemist that the advice should be to the professional body and not to the veterinary surgeon privately.

CHAIRMAN: Does anyone have strong feelings that the use of polythene containers should be discontinued in the interests of security, bearing in mind that security does not rest solely with the container by any means. It does depend on the way the package is handled by the authorities.

(No objections were raised)

CHAIRMAN: There are two matters which have arisen as a result of the symposium which I wish to raise. Firstly, papers given at the symposium have recognised the importance of the horse and metabolic processes of the horse in relation to dope testing and secondly I feel our authority certainly, and perhaps a great many others, would like a statement from us on the subject of pre-race testing. I would propose the following wording: That the scientific limitations of pre-race testing are recognised but the potential value to racing is of importance and should be kept under review.