

Exploring the role of equine veterinary surgeons in exotic disease preparedness

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BACKGROUND

The preparation for, and response to, exotic diseases relies on a coordinated response from key stakeholders. Veterinary surgeons are at the frontline of disease incursions, but little is known about their views on preparedness.

METHODS

Semi-structured interviews with 14 first opinion equine veterinary surgeons in Great Britain were conducted between December 2018 and May 2019. Interview duration ranged from 33 min to 1 hour 27 min. The interviews were recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analysed using thematic analysis.

RESEARCH QUESTION: HOW DO VETERINARY SURGEONS VIEW EXOTIC EQUINE DISEASE PREPAREDNESS?

STREAMLINING KNOWLEDGE

Keeping up-to-date on common issues means filtering out less common ones (like exotic diseases)



NAVIGATING CLIENT RELATIONSHIPS

Veterinary surgeons have little control over clients' willingness to implement everyday prevention



REALITY OF DAILY PRACTICE

INTERNAL STRUGGLE

UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

The themes depicted an internal struggle between **adapting to realities of daily practice** but feeling burdened by **unrealistic expectations** to fix historical attitudes towards preparedness

CYCLE OF REACTIVITY

The reactive attitude towards outbreaks makes it difficult to promote or practise prevention



UPHILL BATTLE

Veterinary surgeons are up against several structural barriers that impede preparedness



ILLUSTRATIVE QUOTES

I learned all those things because we got lectures at university on emerging and exotic diseases [...] but to be honest, because it's not relevant to what you're doing day to day, you forget it.

- "Emily" (Scotland)



Ultimately, all I can do is offer them my advice and if they ignore that, that's their problem then. It's not my responsibility to nanny them through doing it.

- "Emma" (Norfolk)



We deal with it as it arrives on our doorstep. We do try to be pre-emptive I suppose but I don't know that as a profession we're very good at it.

- "Daniel" (Suffolk)



We have regulations for a reason but if we're not going to adhere to them, then what's the point in having them in the first place?

- "Alice" (Northumberland)



CONCLUSIONS

- 1) Veterinary surgeons accepted that they would be frontline responders to disease emergencies, but until that time, preparing for exotic diseases could not be prioritised among their other responsibilities.
- 2) Preparedness can be adapted to fit within veterinary surgeons' daily practice by ensuring effective systems are in place to provide support if an exotic disease is suspected.
- 3) The onus of preparedness cannot be placed on veterinary surgeons alone; a holistic approach integrating all sectors of the horse industry is needed to promote positive change.