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Are Cases of Equine Protozoal Myeloencephalitis (EPM) in North America on the Rise?

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The rate of equine protozoal myeloencephalitis (EPM) did not change over the 18 yr of this study. Standardbreds, Walking Horses, Thoroughbreds, and males were predisposed to EPM. EPM is still prevalent in North America. Authors’ addresses: Department of Comparative Medicine, University of Tennessee, College of Veterinary Medicine, Knoxville, Tennessee 37996 (Odoi); Department of Large Animal Clinical Sciences, Virginia-Maryland Regional College of Veterinary Medicine, Blacksburg, Virginia 24061 (Witonsky); and Equine Health Studies Program, Department of Veterinary Clinical Sciences, School of Veterinary Medicine, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70803 (Andrews); e-mail: fandrews@lsu.edu. *Presenting and corresponding author. © 2010 AAEP.

1. Introduction
EPM is a serious neurologic disease in horses. The objectives of this study were to: assess temporal changes in the proportion of cases reported to veterinary teaching hospitals in North America and assess the perception of veterinary practitioners regarding incidence of EPM.

2. Materials and Methods
Medical records were extracted from the Veterinary Medical Data Base (VMDB) from 1990 to 2007. Proportional morbidity rate (PMR) of EPM was computed and compared across breeds and years. An online survey of veterinary practitioners was conducted from January 15 to May 15, 2008, to assess perception of practitioners regarding incidence of EPM.

3. Results
The PMR was 0.88% (1,710/195,139). There was no significant change in PMR observed over the 18-yr period of the study. Standardbreds (1.59%), Walking Horses (1.37%), and Thoroughbreds (1.31%) had significantly (p < 0.05) higher PMR compared with the PMR for all breeds. The majority (76%) of practitioners thought that the incidence of EPM had not changed or decreased in the previous 2–4 yr.

4. Discussion
Although there was a significant increase in EPM cases from 1995 to 1997, the PMR did not change over the study period. This was also the perception of practitioners that were surveyed. Also, it seems that Standardbreds, Walking Horses, Thoroughbred, and males are more likely to be diagnosed with EPM. The PMR in this study should be interpreted with caution, because it depends on the number of cases of both EPM and other diseases reported by university practices.