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CHRB NEWS RELEASE

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EQUINE INJURY EDUCATION FOR TRAINERS AMONG SAFETY MEASURES PROMOTED BY CHRB COMMITTEE

ARCADIA, CA – A comprehensive education program for trainers designed to prevent injuries to racehorses was unveiled Wednesday at a meeting of the Medication and Track Safety Committee of the California Horse Racing Board. The Committee also advanced several other proposals relating to the safety of racehorses and the integrity of racing.

The education program is being jointly developed by the CHRB and the University of California-Davis principally for trainers but also for veterinarians and other licensees to help identify racehorses at risk for catastrophic injury and as a resource for management of racehorses for injury prevention. This is an offshoot of the CHRB-UC Davis Racing Injury Prevention Program. Viewing the education modules could become a requirement of the initial licensing process as well as the centerpiece of a continuing education program.

The Committee viewed excerpts from the first completed education module dealing with injuries to the scapula (shoulder). The PowerPoint presentation, which can be converted to DVD and formatted for an online computer-based program, walked viewers through the process of first understanding how such injuries occur and then providing methods of early detection and proper treatment of mild injuries before they develop into catastrophic fractures.

Dr. Sue Stover, professor and director of the Veterinary Orthopedic Research Laboratory at UC Davis, said the next installments of the education series focusing on the humerus and the fetlock are currently being developed. The fetlock is the most common anatomical location for catastrophic racing injuries. Additional education modules are planned that will focus on other specific injuries and will include information on racehorse management, track surfaces, and other key factors in injury prevention. In concert with the education modules, the program has developed two pamphlets on specific injuries (the scapula and humerus), with additional pamphlets planned for the program.

CHRB Executive Director Kirk Breed said the Board has not yet decided precisely how the program will be implemented. He said it should be educational for any trainer of a horse that has suffered a catastrophic injury. He also said there has been discussion of possibly selling the training modules to other racing jurisdictions and national organizations for their own continuing education programs in order to recoup some of the costs of developing the program.

In other business, Commissioner Bo Derek, who chairs the Committee, and Commissioner Chuck Winner agreed to recommend that the full Board invoke CHRB Rule 1844.1 to suspend the use of clenbuterol in California thoroughbred racing. If the Board adopts the recommendation, the ban would go into effect 10 days later. Clenbuterol is a beta-2 agonist, an FDA approved bronchodilator for horses. It also has adrenergic side effects that can mimic anabolic steroids at higher doses.

Last year the Board suspended the use of clenbuterol in quarter horse racing at Los Alamitos, a move the quarter horse industry requested in order to combat the widespread use of clenbuterol, including illegal forms of the drug used to promote muscle growth. Dino Perez, business manager for the Pacific Coast Quarter Horse Racing Association (PCQHRA) representing horsemen at Los Alamitos, testified Wednesday there is “overall satisfaction” with the ban. PCQHRA and the California Authority of Racing Fairs have asked the Board to extend the suspension for authorization of clenbuterol to quarter horses running at the fairs this summer.

The organizations representing thoroughbred owners and thoroughbred trainers have not stated their positions on the proposal to ban clenbuterol at their tracks. But trainer John Shirreffs, who chairs the advisory panel to the Committee, said clenbuterol is being abused in the thoroughbred industry and poses a danger to horses. He advocates a ban on its use and assured the commissioners that many other trainers feel the same way.

Dr. Rick Arthur, the Board’s equine medical director, and Dr. Scott Stanley, head of the Ken Maddy Laboratory at UC Davis, reported that 58 percent of the samples collected from thoroughbreds in the Board’s out-of-competition testing program in March contained clenbuterol. More in-depth research involving plasma samples currently being conducted at UC Davis should be completed within 60 days. They do not believe the use of illegal, high-strength clenbuterol in thoroughbred racing is anywhere near as widespread as in quarter horse racing.

The Committee agreed to recommend to the full Board several other proposals dealing with racehorse safety and racing integrity, including proposed rule amendments to:

- Add zilpaterol and ractopamine to the prohibited practices list. If approved by the Board, these drugs would not be permitted on the premises of any facility within the Board’s jurisdiction. As such, positive findings in the Board’s out-of-competition testing program could be prosecuted as if the horse was in a race.
- Allow a claim to be voided if the post-race test sample contains a prohibited substance. A similar rule already is in effect in New York.
- Adoption of the international welfare guidelines prohibiting the racing of pregnant mares beyond 120 days of gestation.

The Committee took no position on a proposal to require submission of the preceding six months of veterinary medical records for any horse undergoing a postmortem examination but referred the proposal to the full Board for consideration without a recommendation.

Dr. Peta Hitchens, a post-doctoral epidemiologist in Dr. Stover's laboratory, demonstrated a voluntary online veterinary medical history program that will be part of the Racing Injury Prevention Program. This medical history program is being conducted by UC Davis independently of the CHRB and is strictly for research purposes. The online program provides a simplified approach for attending veterinarians to provide key medical history information on horses with catastrophic injuries and other randomly selected horses.

The Committee will continue to monitor and evaluate racing in California and nationally in its consideration of proposals to restrict purses and set minimum bottom claiming levels.

The Committee received reports that all tracks in California either have or are in the process of upgrading ambulance service during racing and training hours so as to meet the high standard set last year by Del Mar Race Track for the treatment and transportation of injured riders. Brad McKenzie, representing Los Alamitos Race Course, said they recently held a meeting with Orange County emergency medical personnel, including doctors, trauma paramedics, and others familiar with emergency medical response laws and procedures in Orange County. Los Alamitos jockeys and their Guild representatives also attended. McKenzie said the meeting was highly informative and they made great progress in developing a program that will provide the "highest standard" for emergency medical services at Los Alamitos.

Acting on a report by the California Thoroughbred Trainers that stakeholders are successfully working together to accurately report the gelding of horses entered to race, the Committee decided to take no action but will continue monitoring the situation.

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