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## **The Power of Collaboration**

### **When the Whole is Greater than the Sum of the Parts**

When trying to instigate change for the betterment of horses and their jockeys, to challenge long held beliefs and values and to introduce new checks and balances to sacred traditions it is a brave pioneer who dares to peep above the parapet and lead the way.

A common theme which has echoed through this years' ISES Down Under 2017 conference in Wagga Wagga, New South Wales is what ISES Hon Fellow, Prof. Jan Ladewig calls the tenacious 'implementology' of research findings. In our attempts to affect positive change we must find ways to influence the influencers, to reach out to those who can benefit the most and from whom we can elicit a listening ear.

An excellent plenary presentation by Dr. Peta Hitchens a Research Fellow in Equine Veterinary Epidemiology at the University of Melbourne, showcased the true power of a collaborative effort. It is clear that providing and publishing findings is not enough but, a well organized alliance with all stakeholders, can lead to much greater outcomes.

During her plenary, she described the process of successfully gathering invested parties, of understanding the needs and priorities of each and the leadership required to drive them toward a common purpose and keep them on track. Recently, the University of Melbourne, Racing Victoria and the Victorian State Government have contributed funding to the Equine Limb Injury Prevention Program led by Prof. Chris Whitton. The project will conduct a detailed and long-term investigation into the causation, frequency and risk factors associated with horse and jockey injuries and mortality in Thoroughbred racing. This project will investigate possible interventions and modifiers to enhance the safety of all involved. Dr. Hitchens is ideally placed to collaborate with these groups, combining her expertise in epidemiological research, her experience working within the racing industry and knowledge of government. Her unique viewpoint and skill set will be invaluable in the collaborative effort.

Dr Hitchens explained that because these bodies are financially and ideologically invested in the common goal of increased safety, they are well placed to begin implementing changes whenever scientific findings point out obvious risk mitigation measures. Their work is already resulting in improvements to the education programs of veterinary residents, students, trainers and race officials. The ongoing commitment to monitoring and further scrutiny will lead to further improvements as the collaborative effort matures.

Dr Hitchens insisted that when collaboration is mutual to and inclusive of all those involved, there is potential for achieving a greater impact, faster progress as well as improved exchange of information and sharing of resources, allowing for larger projects to be tackled.

The ongoing challenge for those working in academia is to take the contents of their research and carry them through to application at a grass roots level, where it can benefit the horses and humans who motivated the study in the first place. It is clear that good communication and empathy for the view points of others is key in forming relationships and developing trust, smoothing the bridge between science and the implementation of change.

The themes of facilitating collaboration, communication and meaningful change are rippling through the round table conversations of delegates at this year's conference. From the 'giants' of equitation science to the impassioned student presenters at ISES 2017 Down Under the delegates are being inspired to go forward respectfully, but persistently in the face of resistance, maintain courage in their convictions and confidence in allowing the data to guide the way.

The International Society for Equitation Science (ISES) is a not-for-profit organisation that aims to facilitate research into the training of horses to enhance horse welfare and improve the horse-rider relationship. [www.equitationscience.com](http://www.equitationscience.com)

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