



# Farm Vet News

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## ANAEMIA IN ALPACAS

**Anaemia is a clinical condition linked to a reduced number of red cells and/or haemoglobin content in the blood. As clinical Vets with a significant alpaca caseload, we only encounter this presentation sporadically, but often enough to warrant an increased awareness among breeders.**

Our concern is that it can go easily unnoticed, and when it does get noticed it might be too late. Mortality is indeed high in severely affected animals. The main, initial presenting clinical sign is very a-specific: chronic weight loss. Additionally the individual affected is typically listless, with reduced appetite and might withdraw from the group.

On closer inspection, mucosal membranes are pale, and in advanced stages, basically white. Blood sampling and haematology profile confirms the diagnosis of anaemia, with advanced stages showing as low as one tenth of the values of the main parameters investigated, but does not tell us what is causing it. Additionally, the white cell count is increased, suggesting a concomitant infection, but this finding is a-specific too, not pointing to a specific agent.

Under UK conditions, the two main differential diagnoses are infection with *Haemonchus contortus*, a glandular stomach parasite which feeds on blood, and a parasite of the red cell called *Mycoplasma haemolamae*.

For the latter, very little information is available in the scientific literature, but it can be diagnosed by a specific blood test.

However, as to why individuals within herds with excellent standards of farming, including parasite control, develop the condition remains unknown, and the feeling is that we are missing additional contributing and/or determinant factors.

The message to take home here is to be vigilant, apply high standards of stockmanship and nutrition, and avoiding over stocking and over grazing.

A comprehensive plan for endo-parasite control should always be in place, and the periodic assessment of the body condition by restraint and palpation of the lumbar area is of paramount importance. If you are in doubt, call us out.

Taking a blood sample and testing for anaemia is quick and very affordable, and it could give us the chance of an early intervention and improved prognosis.

# DISBUDDING OF GOAT KIDS

**As a Practice, we are increasingly asked to disbud goat kids. The procedure is carried out to prevent horn growth by removing the 'bud' of the horn at early stages, therefore preventing injuries to other animals and people.**

In some cases there is also a cosmetic component attached to the procedure, with a polled appearance desired according to breed, but this is questionable practice.

It is also true to say though that many goats live happily while fully horned and causing no injuries to others, but of course the potential is there. In calves, where the procedure is standard practice in the UK, disbudding is carried out under local anaesthetic and manual restraint. However, goats are very sensitive to local anaesthetics, including severe side effects and even death.

The use of a general anaesthetic is therefore considered mandatory, making this procedure rather unique in first opinion veterinary practice, because we seldom have to give a general anaesthetic to very young animals.

The ideal age for disbudding is around one week of age, and males can (should) be castrated at the same time. Leaving the disbudding for later in life makes it more invasive and more prone to complications.

As an anaesthetic, we are using a combination of three different agents all mixed in the same syringe and delivered intra muscular, so easy and quick to administer. We are finding the protocol effective, with an excellent and quick response to the reversal agent. No need to say, the kids are standing very quickly following reversal, but they will look a bit sleepy for few hours, so a degree of increased monitoring is required (and the doe might act a bit different than normal towards this rather 'spaced out' kid!).

When having to anaesthetise very young animals fasting prior to an anaesthetic is not advisable, so the kid stays with mum right until before the disbudding, and goes back to her right after, as soon as it is able to walk properly. One of the agents in the anaesthetic combo is a pain killer, so the kid affords a degree of pain relief also after the disbudding is completed. For dosing, we aim at getting exact weight of the animal all the time.

As in calves, disbudding is not an exact procedure, and occasionally individuals will re-grow a stump. In practical terms this is not an issue, being the stump small and round edged, so not able to cause injuries. On the contrary, a cosmetic disappointment is unacceptable. The disbudding should be carried solely for health and safety reasons.



## AN INTERVIEW WITH KEITH CUTLER Senior Partner at Endell Veterinary Group



Keith Cutler (left) pictured with Gian Lorenzo D'Alterio

***Keith, you have been with the Practice a long time, starting in 1990. What changes have you observed in the livestock sector during this time?***

The major change is that we work with fewer dairy farms, the dairies we work with have more cows, and the cows we work with are giving much more milk. In 1990 100-cow dairies were common, cows were giving 6000 litres of milk in the lactation period and milk quality parameters, such as somatic cell count, were of no particular concern. Some of the farms that went out of dairying started beef suckler herds, so now we work with more beef farms than before, probably as many as twice the number of dairies that we have on our books today. Another big difference would be the level of intervention by farmers, so now farmers are more able and willing to treat cases themselves. For example, when I qualified if you needed to put ropes on a calf to calve the cow, it was a vet job. Nowadays, if you get called out to a calving it is going to be a difficult calving, and as a result C-sections are more common. We now work with more small-holder clients, and we see more exotic farm animals, such as camelids. Since I started at the Practice, we have been trying to engage more with sheep farmers, but that hasn't changed much!

***The delivery of veterinary services to commercial sheep flocks is notoriously difficult, with limited uptake. How can we change this, and manage to convince clients of the benefits of regular Vet involvement?***

Over the years we have been quite successful in engaging with beef suckler herds, and there are many similarities in the farming system with sheep units, although the value of the individual animal is lower in sheep. I believe that we need to be competent and interested in the sheep business, and ask what clients want from us, rather than the other way around.

***The UK is due to leave the EU in March 2019. What impact will Brexit have on the livestock sector?***

I understand some of the vetting, I don't understand a lot of the politics! I believe there will be an impact on the import/export, not as much in live animals, but in animal produce. Some of the policies might have to change. For example, the TB eradication policy is in part dictated, and funded, by the EU. To gain better control of the policy might bring some benefit, but the funding for it will still need to be available. I am hoping that there won't be a shortage of Vets willing to work as TB testers, as many are currently from EU countries.

***Talking about staff recruitment, it is fair to say that there is a shortage of farm Vets, and more in general of Vets willing to work in first opinion practice. Some are now referring to a recruitment crisis. Why is that, despite an increase in number of UK vet schools and students?***

This is a complex issue, with multiple factors. Our profession must take some of the responsibility, but expectations from employees have also changed over time. We use to 'live to work', now many expect the opposite. Remuneration expectations might be unfulfilled too, and many are left wondering why bother to work long hours, cold and wet, and covered in animal manure (edited!), while at the same time being criticised for being too expensive! The profession has also seen a dramatic increase in female vets, and a proportion will start a family and never go back to full time employment.

***You have a strong interest and involvement, at different levels, in the control of infectious diseases in cattle. What are the main priorities in this field? Are the control methods implemented effective?***

When it comes to controlling a number of infectious diseases, many are concerned about the costs involved, considering that profit margins are low. However, one must see the direct and indirect cost on productivity of the infectious agents. So, it is important that we make farmers aware of the costs that today they are sustaining already if one or more of these diseases are present in the herd. I believe that control and ultimately eradication of BVD is achievable with the diagnostic tools and policies available today. There are excellent examples of enthusiastic Vets making much progress on this with their clients, with significant areas of England virtually free from BVD already. The challenge is to merge all these areas under the umbrella of a true eradication scheme. However, when it comes to Johne's disease, for example, the scenario is different, and we are constrained by the limitations of the currently available diagnostic tools. Short term, to overcome these limits, we should adopt a stricter policy when dealing with inconclusive results.

***In your opinion, what are the strengths and limitations of the current Farm Animal team at Endell?***

We have very good, young Vets full of enthusiasm, alongside our older Vets. Together, we have a wide range of expertise and we offer high quality, comprehensive veterinary services. We don't always get it right, but at times we are limited by the financial resources made available to us. I must admit, I have very high expectations, towards myself and colleagues, so when disappointment hits, it hits harder.

***For over one year now Endell has joined forces with the Royal Veterinary College (RVC) to deliver residential, structured farm animal clinical training to final year students. What do you make of this partnership?***

First of all, it is worth noting that the RVC has been recently voted as one of the three best vet schools in the world, so if the RVC has a high enough opinion of Endells and trusts us with delivering much of the farm animal training of students in the field, that is a feather in our cap for sure. I personally enjoy the challenge of teaching the students. It keeps you up to date with developments in the field, and I believe this has positive repercussions for our clients and their animals. In addition, visiting farms with the students allows us to undertake procedures which perhaps might never take place, for example focusing on defined elements of farming practices. Finally, it allows some of our clients to interact with vet students and build an early relation with those who might become their future consultants.

***Looking back at your career so far, what have you enjoyed most, and the least?***

I really enjoy the clinical vetting side of my job, and I thrive in the relationship with most of the farmers. I am very much an 'animal person', so I find less appealing the commitment to the running of the business side of my profession.

***Finally, you are a busy man. In your limited spare time, what do you like to do?***

I enjoy spending time with my family. We travel a lot, following my daughter Katy playing water polo. I am enthusiastic about natural history, and butterflies and photography are one of my main interests. And one day soon my wife, Sam (who is a Partner at Endells), and I will go back to ballroom dancing!



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