

New drugs schedule makes horse racing a sure thing

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What do Gai Waterhouse and Anthony Cummings have in common with Queen Elizabeth II?

They've all owned horses that have been at the centre of doping scandals – but new research by a consortium including the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) is set to provide more certainty around the sometimes dicey business of administering therapeutic drugs to horses.

QUT Professor of Biosciences, Martin Sillence, said the new research pinpointed the length of time it took for 18 of the most commonly used therapeutic drugs to work their way out of a horse's system, providing greater certainty for horse owners, trainers and vets.

"Because horses are prohibited from racing with any trace of drugs in their system, the administration of therapeutic drugs to horses in need of care has been a risky business," Professor Sillence said.

"It's been all too easy to unwittingly be caught out with a winning horse on race day, that's subsequently found to have traces of a drug in its system.

"Most commonly this is from the administration of therapeutic drugs to help a horse overcome an illness or muscular condition.

"With no accurate schedule to indicate how long drugs take to work their way out of horses' systems, a fair amount of guesswork has always been

involved.

"The new schedule should change all this," Professor Sillence said.

He also said the research would set the scene for better healthcare of horses.

"In the absence of certainty around drug excretion times, some trainers may have at times been reluctant to have horses treated and this has not always been in the horse's welfare.

"Now armed with more certainty, trainers and vets can be more sure of the impact [therapeutic drugs](#) will have on horses and make better informed decisions about the best treatment regimes.

"It gives veterinarians and trainers the freedom to use legitimate medications with less risk of returning a positive drugs test."

Professor Sillence said the research would provide the equine industry with the ability to set detection times with more confidence and accuracy and should result in fewer positive test returns.

"It will provide the sport with greater integrity," he said.

Professor Sillence said each year the Australian horse industry had more than 650,000 starters in thoroughbred and harness races and other equestrian pursuits and the nation's thoroughbred population was second only to that of the USA.

He said research involved the examination of more than 20,000 blood and urine samples as well as the development of new forensic tests.

"This work will now be shared internationally, enabling Australia to

contribute to the international standardisation of drug testing protocols," Professor Sillence said.

The \$1.2M four-year research project was funded by the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC) and industry partners and was undertaken by the four Australian racing laboratories in QLD, NSW, WA and VIC together with QUT, Charles Sturt University and the Universities of Queensland and Pennsylvania.

The report, The Pharmacokinetics of Equine Medications, <https://rirdc.infoservices.com.au/items/11-117> is available from the RIRDC.

Anthony Cummings' Sydney and Melbourne stables were the subject of a stewards' inquiry in 1999 following allegations that 45 horses were injected with the anabolic steroid trenbolone.

In 2008 Gai Waterhouse was found guilty of presenting a horse to the races with a prohibited substance in its system and Nicky Henderson, trainer of the Queen's horse Moonlit Path was in 2009 banned from racing his own [horses](#) for three months after the horse tested positive for an anti-bleeding drug before it was raced at Huntingdon.

Provided by Queensland University of Technology

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