

PHR News

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Arabian Horse Association Establishes Task Force On Genetic Diseases

By Hilary Nixon

The Arabian Horse Association (AHA) of Aurora, CO, has established an Arabian Horse Association task force on genetic diseases. The task force was created under the direction of and announced by AHA President Lance Walters.

“The purpose of the task force is to have a group of AHA members regularly focused on genetic diseases. The end result will be an Arabian horse community that is educated about genetic diseases and knowledgeable about testing and disclosure. The task force will guide the association in developing policies and educational programs to educate the Arabian horse community about genetic diseases associated with the Arabian breed. The establishment of the task force emphasizes that we are a breed organization interested in preserving our breed,” said Walters.

The conception for the new task force originated after the philanthropic arm of AHA, the Arabian Horse Foundation (AHF) appointed a panel of equine research advisors in 2008 and donated thousands to universities and colleges conducting genetic disease research. Appointed as chair of the new task force is Beth Minnich, of Mill Creek, WA. Minnich holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Equine Science from Colorado State University and has over 20 years of experience with the Arabian breed. Minnich also chairs the foundation’s Equine Research Advisory Panel.

“The Arabian Horse Association has taken a significant step forward with the establishment of the task force. Genetic conditions exist among a variety of horse breeds, so this is not something unique to the Arabian horse. However, many times these disorders are very quietly talked about in private, away from public view,” said Minnich. “With the creation of this task force, AHA is recognizing the importance of bringing this subject out for more broadbased discussion among the membership. Consequently, AHA will take a leading role in educating its

members about various genetic disorders and encourage its members to utilize available tests and disclose results.”

One of the four areas the AHF funds is equine research. Other funding categories include youth scholarships, equine rescue/rehoming and general education. “We have had considerable interest from members in designating funds for equine veterinary research,” said Larry Kinneer, AHF President. “The formation of the task force is in response to what our members have expressed an interest in.” Last year the foundation gave away approximately \$10,000 for equine veterinary research.

Minnich pointed out that currently, “There is no complete, central location where our members can go to find information about genetic disorders, financially support research in specific areas and purchase available tests. We need to merge the efforts of the major Arabian horse organizations and provide this information to owners and breeders.”

Minnich added, “When the Arabian horse community was faced with Severe Combined Immunodeficiency (SCID) back in the 1970s and 1980s, it responded with the formation of the Fight off Arabian Lethals (FOAL) Commission to help educate owners and support genetic disease research. Since that time, a test for SCID has been developed, over 8,000 horses have been tested and the AHA Code of Ethics has addressed SCID disclosure in the Code of Conduct. The lesson to be learned from this is that focused efforts can be very successful.”

Equine research technology, Minnich said “has undergone major advances in the past several years; most notably, the completion of the equine genome sequence, which has exponentially increased the ability to map heritable diseases in a shorter amount of time, with fewer samples and less expense. There is now an indirect DNA test available for Cerebellar Abiotrophy and current research on Lavender Foal Syndrome, which is yielding some very encouraging preliminary data. The Arabian community needs to take advantage of the research options available and work to develop the necessary tests so owners can obtain the information needed to make informed breeding decisions.”

Recommendations from the task force will help create a base for development of potential resolutions for delegate vote and/or action by the AHA Board of Directors, Minnich added. Additional task force members will be

announced later.

For more information about the new task force, contact Minnich at Phanilah@aol.com.