

# SHEEP PRACTICE NEWSLETTER

## WINTER 2011



### Clostridial disease

What a great year for sheep! With prices as good as they have been, and the mild spring and autumn extending the grazing season by a good couple of months there is a lot of optimism on our rounds. Most of you will have tuppied or have the ram in now, so fingers crossed for a bumper lamb crop with the extra grass pushing up lambing percentages.

If you don't already scan your ewes, this might be a year to consider starting as you may have more multiples than usual and it pays to get your feeding right.



With the lamb price being as good as it has been, we have done more post mortems this year than usual. An enormous percentage of these have shown signs of clostridial disease of one type or another. Clostridial diseases affect a range of different body systems and are caused by several different bacteria, but the end result is nearly always the same—sudden death! I will describe some of the common ones below, so if you feel the inclination to open up some dead lambs yourself you will know what to look for. If you are busy or squeamish, remember a PM at the surgery is only about £20.



### **Pulpy Kidney**

Tends to affect strong, well grown lambs between 6 months and a year old. Often follows a change in diet onto silage aftermath or brassica crops. Losses may be as high as 10-15% in the worst cases. Easily diagnosed at post mortem as the kidneys (found up against the backbone in the abdomen) disintegrate to a pulpy mass on handling. They should normally be quite firm, even when you cut into them.



### **Black disease**

Usually occurs secondary to acute fluke damage, so is usually seen in the autumn/early winter. On post mortem the liver appears dark and fragile, with haemorrhagic tracts. Losses may be as high as 30% in a really bad fluke year, but more commonly are about 5%.

### **Braxy**

This is a rare condition, usually seen in hogs on winter turnips following heavy frosts. Diagnosis is sudden

death following this history, but you may see signs of abomasal damage at post mortem.

### **Blackleg**

Also tends to be seen in animals wintered on root crops, as the organism is soil borne (as are many clostridia). Easily seen post mortem as the affected leg tends to be grossly swollen and gassy.

### **Lamb Dysentery**

Very different from the other diseases in that it affects newborn lambs (< 1 week old). Again, sudden death is seen, but often you will see acute abdominal pain for a few hours before. On post mortem, the small intestines are an angry dark red.

An important differential for clostridial disease in store lambs is **redgut**. This also tends to occur following a change in diet onto fast growing lush pasture for a period of 3 weeks or more. The easily digestible, high carbohydrate diet passes through the rumen more quickly leading to hindgut fermentation, which progresses to a torsion. This is easily visible at post mortem, when the intestines are seen as bright red and distended (see below)



The condition is best managed by alternating 5 days of lush pasture with 2 days of rough pasture, to fill up the rumen and reduce gut transit time.

Another common cause of death following changes on to new pasture is **Pasteurella**, which was discussed in a previous newsletter. This principally causes respiratory signs, but can also be isolated from other organ

systems. This is an important diagnosis, because prompt antibiotic treatment of the group with Terramycin LA will reduce losses, whereas all the previous conditions mentioned cannot be treated. In live animals, rapid breathing and nasal discharge may be seen, and at post mortem the tips of the lung lobes often have a dark purple margin.

**CCN** tends not to cause sudden deaths, but a more progressive disease pattern following a couple of weeks on lush pasture. Animals are usually seen 'star gazing' with craned necks before recumbency and death. Call the vet if you are suspicious, as Vitamin B1 injections can save these animals.

### **The good news about clostridial disease is that you can vaccinate effectively and cheaply!**

There are multivalent clostridial vaccines available from vets and wholesalers which will provide good protection for ewes and lambs against a wide range of diseases for less than £1 per dose. These include Heptavac, Covexin and Bravoxin. Some cover more diseases than others so check if you have had an unusual diagnosis, but all will cover the most common diseases.

An initial course of 2 injections 4-6 weeks apart is required, followed by a single annual booster about 6 weeks before lambing in ewes in order to provide good immunity through colostrum against lamb dysentery. The initial course for lambs should start at about 8-12 weeks of age.

If an outbreak of pulpy kidney occurs, it is worth vaccinating in the face of an outbreak as the animals are likely to have been sensitized from the natural exposure. Protection is good after about 48 hours post vaccination.

Happy Christmas,



Ed



