

International Expert Leads Illinois Equine Team

By Herb Whiteley

Dr. Pamela Wilkins, our new equine section head, brings with her an impressive list of accomplishments in her field and an enthusiasm for building the Illinois program.

Dr. Wilkins spent the past 11 years on faculty at the University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine. Double boarded in internal medicine and emergency and critical care, she established the academic section of equine emergency and critical care at Penn's New Bolton Center in 2002 and served as its head until joining Illinois last August.

Her bachelor's, DVM, master's, and PhD degrees were earned at Cornell University. She also worked as an associate veterinarian at an equine practice in New York for two years after finishing her master's degree.

"Illinois really wants to improve and promote the equine program," says Dr. Wilkins, in explaining the appeal of the new position. "The College has demonstrated a commitment to that.

"The equine faculty are very talented and enthusiastic. They truly want to work as a team."

In her first months as section head, she has been impressed by the faculty's shared focus on providing the best patient care and giving students the best education.

Teamwork underscores some of the new services Dr. Wilkins will introduce.

"We plan to develop a holistic approach to the evaluation of performance horses," she says. "My goal is to offer 'workup' packages that include a pre-established list of tests for a set fee. We may have packages for evaluations related to colic, respiratory problems, lameness, sick foals, and so on."

This approach will improve service for and communications with referring veterinarians and owners. "Clients will know when they walk in the door what they'll be getting and for how much," says Dr. Wilkins.

Having routine admission protocols for a variety of conditions means the section will collect a storehouse of standardized patient data that can be analyzed to provide more accurate prognosis assessments for each condition.

Dr. Wilkins applies a research-based approach to enhancing the service her section provides. She intends to survey clients and referring veterinarians to assess areas where services and communication can be improved.

She also plans to expand the equine medicine residency program.

A frequent speaker at the annual American Association of Equine Practitioners conference, the International Veterinary Emergency and Critical Care symposium, and several European meetings and institutions, Dr. Wilkins has wide-ranging interests in equine medicine. Her current research looks at indicators of severity of disease and prognosis in the adult horse and the foal.

In recent studies she has shown that circulating bacteria, as detected in blood cultures, is predictive of mortality among horses with gastrointestinal disease. For adult horses—but not for foals—the presence of circulating bacteria means the patient is 12 times more likely to die than horses without a bacterial blood infection.

The prevailing view had been that adult horses—but not foals—with GI problems should not be given antibiotics, which are feared to exacerbate the GI symptoms.

Pointing to her data, Dr. Wilkins is out to change the prevailing view. “I am all about challenging paradigms,” she says with a grin.

If you attend the AAEP meeting in San Diego, plan on meeting her at the Illinois alumni reception on December 8. At the North American Veterinary Conference in Orlando, plan to attend one of her five lectures or meet her at our alumni reception on January 18.

You can also call her to confer on any equine medicine or emergency case at 217-333-2000

Sidebar:

The Illinois Equine Team

“There are great equine faculty and exciting things happening at Illinois,” says Dr. Pam Wilkins, the new section head. “That is so appealing to me and drew me to this position.”

Here is an overview of the equine faculty at Illinois:

- **Jim Brendemuehl** is a specialist in equine reproduction. He makes field calls through the hospital’s ambulatory service and also has commitments to Extension and the Animal Science’s breeding program.
- Surgeon **Chris Byron** pursues research and clinical interests in cartilage physiology and treatments including glucosamine, shock wave therapy, and arthroscopy.
- Long-time Illinois internist **Jon Foreman** took over as associate dean for academic and student affairs last fall, but maintains a limited schedule on clinics.
- **Kara Lascola** left Tufts to join the Illinois faculty in November. She is an internist who will work with Dr. Wilkins to establish a program in pulmonary testing to evaluate poorly performing horses, whether race horses, competitive horses or pleasure horses.
- **Allison Stewart** is a surgeon with a focus on lameness problems and a research program in stem cell therapy for tendon and joint repair.
- **Matt Stewart** directs the graduate and research programs for the Department of Veterinary Clinical Medicine while also seeing equine patients and conducting research in orthopedics, especially joint and tendon injuries in horses.
- **Pam Wilkins’s** recent research focuses on the perinatal and neonatal critical foal and lactate metabolism and bacterial blood cultures in foals and adult horses as indicators of disease severity and prognosis.

“I’m looking forward to helping students and faculty find their niche in the field and to spending time on clinics, too.”

Dr. Wilkins is currently chairing a search for a third equine surgeon.