

# Horse Trails and Tales

Eleanor Kellon, VMD

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## *The Information Age*

I remember being dragged reluctantly into the computer world way back when, but the incredible capacity to communicate and learn with this medium is quickly addictive.

How reliant we have become on the internet hits home hard when it's not available. My DSL service was down all day yesterday. I had presentations to work on anyway so it was a good nudge to get going on that, but every few minutes I found myself wanting to double check a fact, look for details in a reference, find a better illustration, etc.

Gone are the days of holing up in a medical library doing laborious and time-consuming searches for information. What used to take hours takes only minutes. Even full length copies of most articles are available immediately.

Information is there for the taking but not all sources are equally credible. Some newspapers and lay magazines do a good job of reporting on scientific issues, others not so much. Sensational headlines with claims like "breakthrough" that are really not supported by the work are very common. Even when the body of the story tones this down, with liberal use of words like "might" or "could", that headline might stick in your head. The best way to sort through the hype is to read the actual study.

Least reliable of all are announcements of some discovery before the work has even been published. These are basically press releases. They're the equivalent of late night TV guest appearances by actors that have a new movie to promote. In the normal course of events, a study's design and conclusions are reviewed independently before it is accepted for inclusion in a journal or meeting presentation.

In the same vein of finding information you can trust:

### **E-zine announcement**

In addition to the regular articles in *The Horse's Mouth*, we will have a monthly feature where current research of practical importance to you will be discussed. Joan Kulifay will write these features. Joan is currently completing a Masters of Science in Equine Science with the University of Edinburgh. As always, just the facts.

*Eleanor Kellon, VMD*