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BAKER INSTITUTE *for* ANIMAL HEALTH

Dedicated to the study of veterinary infectious diseases, immunology, genetics, and reproduction.



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Gerlinde Van de Walle and Farrah at the Baker Institute's McConville Barn.

Dr. Gerlinde Van de Walle Named Harry M. Zweig Assistant Professor in Equine Health

February 17, 2017

In recognition of her success in research related to the health of horses, Dr. Gerlinde Van de Walle has been named the Harry M. Zweig Assistant Professor in Equine Health. The three-year term endowed position recognizes a junior faculty member who shows promise and productivity in the field of equine research.

[Dr. Van de Walle's equine research program](#) focuses on infectious diseases and wound healing, work that has been funded by the [Zweig Memorial Fund](#), [Boehringer Ingelheim](#), the [National Institutes of Health](#), the [United States Department of Agriculture](#), the [Cornell Stem Cell Program](#), and the [American Quarter Horse Foundation](#). The results promise to not only help improve the health and wellbeing of horses, but of humans and other animal species as well.

In her infectious disease work, Dr. Van de Walle examines the possible roles of viruses in two common conditions in horses: ulcers and hepatitis. Gastric ulcers are particularly widespread among racing horses, and it has long been suspected this is due to the stressful

experiences of training, travel, and the track. Dr. Van de Walle's work has uncovered evidence that an infectious cause may be to blame for at least some of these cases, a possibility that offers new treatment options or even a cure, says Dr. Van de Walle.

"If we can link ulcers to an infectious cause we can treat these affected horses and heal them," she says.

In the case of hepatitis, Dr. Van de Walle investigates the ways in which nonprimate hepacivirus (NPHV) causes liver inflammation. Given the close relationship between NPHV and hepatitis C virus, which causes disease in humans, these studies could lead to benefits for both species.

When it comes to wounds, horses often heal quite slowly, particularly on their lower legs. Dr. Van de Walle has been testing stem cells to determine whether they could aid the wound healing process in tissue samples in the lab. Their results show that the substances secreted by stem cells can prevent thick, lumpy scarring (called proud flesh) from forming and also reduce the severity of existing scars. Dr. Van de Walle plans to carry the work forward to testing in horses, and to examine how those treatments may be used in wound management for other animal species, including humans.

An admirer of horses since she was a child, Dr. Van de Walle never had the opportunity to spend much time with them until she began her veterinary training in her native Belgium. The Zweig Assistant Professorship presents her and her research team of graduate students and postdoctoral associates with the opportunity to have a greater impact on the health of these animals, which have always had a unique and powerful relationship with humans.

"The support from the Zweig Memorial Fund is a great foundation; it puts us in a strong position to launch our research into the broader scientific community," says Dr. Van de Walle.