

The Virgin Islands Consortium

St. Thomas Horse Racing Commission Grapples with Veterinary Service Challenges

Urgent need for equine veterinarians in St. Thomas discussed by Racing Commission

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During a recent meeting of the St. Thomas Horse Racing Commission, members discussed the challenge of ensuring the availability of adequate veterinary services for both race days and in the long term within the territory. This topic emerged as a key point of concern among the commission members.

Laura Palminteri, the sole equine veterinarian practicing in the territory, is now a member of the commission. As such, she pointed out during the meeting that “it is a conflict of

interest for me to be doing the commission's work and also being the attending veterinarian. That just does not work."

A long-term replacement, however, may not be easy to come by. Dr. Palminteri indicated that following a recent retirement, there was no veterinarian on staff at the Department of Agriculture.

For the upcoming Carnival race [tentatively scheduled](#) for May 3, bringing in a practitioner from the British Virgin Islands or Puerto Rico would be a simple enough task for the promoter - in this instance the Department of Sports, Parks and Recreation. However Dr. Palminteri said that a more permanent solution might require some creative thinking.

"It would be nice if that person that they do hire [at the Department of Agriculture] can also do some equine work," she mused. One of the biggest challenges in encouraging an equine specialist to settle in the Virgin islands "is that there's not enough work, in my opinion, in the territory for a veterinarian to do just horse work."

Working on equines was a very small percentage of her veterinary practice, Dr. Palminteri disclosed, as a majority of her work was performed on small animals. Now, though, she says finding a vet who cares for equines along with other species is more and more difficult. "It's unusual to have a veterinarian that does both horses and small animals. Veterinarians in general have gotten more specialized," she noted, suggesting that a subsidy may have to be offered to convince a practitioner to move to the territory.