

Vet's Corner: Retreats, Another Use of Treatment Records

This winter, our practice has been using some new antibacterials for the treatment of calf pneumonia.

One pharmaceutical company illustrates the effectiveness of its product with an innovative technique where a tiny loop is inserted in the lung's interstitial tissue to measure the level of antibacterial at the actual site of bacterial infection. The claim is that this type of antibacterial kills the bacteria quickly and no anti-inflammatory is needed to reduce consolidation and permanent damage to the lung.

Another company makes an equally reasonable explanation that their antibacterial is distributed quickly in many organ systems as evidenced by the use of autoradiography on tissues harvested 6 hours after subcutaneous administration of the drug. This antibacterial works by inhibiting the replication of bacteria and must stay in contact with affected tissue for a longer duration and depends on an anti-inflammatory drug to reduce consolidation and permanent lung damage.

Both companies are backed by strong research and logical explanations. The question that veterinarians and calf raisers ask is "Yeah, but does it work?" And once again, the answer can be found in complete on-farm records.

One of the claims of the pharmaceutical companies is that there will be fewer pneumonia retreats with their product. Doesn't this sound familiar? Does this remind you of claims made about mastitis treatment products? Some farms keep complete records of mastitis treatments to help make culling decisions on cows that have repeated mastitis events. Likewise, it is important record treatments of calf pneumonia cases to help evaluate the effectiveness of treatments and the number of cases that relapse at a later age. As with mastitis cases, it is impossible to remember every treated calf, two or three months following treatment.

When an outbreak of calf pneumonia occurs, we create a treatment sheet. The date of treatment, the calf's ID #, age in weeks or months, daily temp, appetite, and drug and dosage are recorded in columns. A fresh page is used for every day of the outbreak and the sheets are saved for a few years. Temp reduction and appetite improvement guide the decision to retreat. Another use of these treatment sheets is for reference if another pneumonia case occurs in older calves, to see if it is a new case or a chronic retreat. If a pattern of retreats emerges for a particular antibacterial, sound written evidence can guide our subsequent treatment decisions.

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