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# Manual of Suture Materials



Dennis Scott BVSc MANZCVS

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The lead story, on page four as always, is about false economy regarding suture materials, in particular needles.

With the state of flux in world markets at the moment and the uncertainty of tariffs, coupled with the fact that all suture materials are manufactured overseas, it is vital to ensure supply of these crucial veterinary tools.

Adding to the overall scheme is the reputed withdrawal of a major US supplier from the veterinary market.

Whether or not that is true it is comforting to know that top quality sutures and needles are

still available from the world's first ever suture manufacturer, the high class Serag Weisser.

The article inside speculates on the dangers of using shoddier low cost alternatives in what, while crucial, is already the cheapest part of any operation.

As part of the service, to help demystify this mundane but rather complex subject EA has available a comprehensive manual of all the different suture types.



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Printed copies of this valuable adjunct to practice are free on request, just ask the EA rep, or digital copies can be mailed.



## The Others Inside

A little bit of everything. Firstly there is an article about the reassessment of gentamicin in the traffic light system, an antimicrobial mostly used in equine medicine

More particularly, for small animal clinicians

there is the disturbing story of the long term effects of potent flea treatments on wildlife.

The final article, for those with a large animal bent, is a look at the prospects for the country's red meat industry. They are

actually quite good thanks to the industry itself responding to social demands.

If all else fails there are the usual funnies interspersed. With a bit of luck at least one of them will tickle your fancy.

## Traffic Light Change

Gentamicin, an antibiotic predominantly used in equine medicine has had a change of status in the NZVA traffic light system.

Originally classified as orange, like other aminoglycosides, gentamicin has been upgraded to critically important by ACVM in its latest tranche of antimicrobial assessment.

**"gentamicin has a different derivation to other common veterinary drugs of this class"**

Although an aminoglycoside, gentamicin has a different derivation to other common veterinary drugs of this class, streptomycin and neomycin, and therefore has a different resistance profile.

Hence cross resistance between gentamicin and other veterinary aminoglycosides is not a major issue.

Thus, while gentamicin is upgraded to red or critically important, the



others can logically stay on orange or highly important.

As always, the red classification does not mean do not use, but stop and think.

Total antimicrobial use is the overriding factor so it is important to use the most appropriate antimicrobial in any given situation. With culture and sensitivity recommended.

## Outdoor Survival

This is a story of self-control and marksmanship by a brave, cool-headed woman with a small pistol against a fierce predator.

What's the smallest calibre that you would trust to protect yourself? Here's her story in her own words:

"While out walking along the edge of a pond just outside my house in 'The Villages' with my soon to be ex-husband, discussing property settlement and other divorce issues, we were surprised by a huge 12-ft. alligator which suddenly emerged from the murky water and began

charging us with its large jaws wide open. She must have been protecting her nest because she was extremely aggressive."

"If I had not had my little Beretta .25 calibre pistol with me, I would not be here today!"

"Just one shot to my estranged husband's knee cap was all it took. The gator got him easily, and I was able to escape by just walking away at a brisk pace.

The amount I saved in lawyer's fees was really incredible, and his life insurance was a really big bonus!"



## Flea Treatments Under Fire

There is a strong current push for veterinary practices to now be more environmentally responsible, and most take it to mean issues with global warming. However, there is also the world of nature to consider and an issue for the veterinary profession has recently come from left field.

There is a call in UK for use of toxic flea treatments for pets to be tightly restricted, as the chemicals kill wildlife including fish and birds.

Neonicotinoid use in pesticides on farms has been banned but the sale of flea treatments to pet owners is still unregulated.

Sources at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs said they had commissioned the veterinary medicines directorate to look at options for potentially restricting the use of these treatments. (Good luck with that!)

Cats and dogs are widely treated with topical treatments that include insecticides to prevent fleas. Vets often recommend regular flea treatments as a preventive measure, even when dogs and cats do not have the pest. But scientists now recommend animals should

not be treated for fleas unless they have them. At the moment, the treatments can be bought by anyone in pet shops around the country.

**"a higher number of unhatched eggs or dead chicks in nests where there was a higher incidence of insecticide."**

Research has found that these treatments enter rivers, killing the wildlife within, and that pet owners using them risk contaminating their hands with the chemicals for at least 28 days after applying the treatment.

A recent study found songbirds were using dog and cat fur tainted with the treatments to create their nests. The scientists found a higher number of unhatched eggs or dead chicks in nests where there was a higher incidence of insecticide.

There is growing concern about the impact these treatments are having on biodiversity. Imidacloprid and fipronil, for example, are powerful insecticides: one monthly flea treatment for a large dog contains enough imidacloprid to kill 25 mil-

lion bees. In the UK, fipronil is an ingredient in 66 different veterinary products, and imidacloprid is in a further 21. These chemicals have been banned for agricultural use since 2018, yet Environment Agency data found fipronil residue in 98% of river and lake samples, and traces of imidacloprid in 66% of all samples.

The government recently committed to banning the use of three more neonicotinoids – clothianidin, imidacloprid and thiamethoxam – from agricultural use.

Source: The Guardian <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/mar/25/call-pets-toxic-flea-treatments-tightly-restricted-uk>

This information clearly would apply to the New Zealand market as well, but responsible use will be difficult to achieve.

Even if veterinary clinics respond the products are open sellers with pet shops and on line retailers selling them.

There is a strong case for regulation but that never happened in the lucrative anthelmintic market and so is unlikely here.

## Cat Groaner

A drunk staggered up to the portal of his home, having spent the evening pleasantly imbibing alcoholic beverages with several of his friends in different local hostelryes.

At first he couldn't find his key. It took him several times searching through his pockets until he found it.

He spent the next ten minutes trying to get the key into the key slot. He eventually got close but the key

pinged off the escutcheon into the garden undergrowth.

The man then spent the best part of 30 minutes searching through the grass and flowers but never found the key.

The man went to the door, looked through the letter box flap and saw the family cat walking in the vestibule.

He gently, and in a loud whisper, called the cat over.

When the cat came over to the door, it sat and peered up at this apparition of eyes peering through the letter box.

The drunk then said 'cat, let me in'

The cat just looked at him and said "Me? 'Ow?"



## False Economy

We see examples of false economy around us all the time. Often, we joke about people driving 30 km to get petrol at a few cents per litre cheaper without realizing false economies in our own environment. When it comes to mundane decisions like home appliances or even grocery shopping cheapest has often not necessarily been the best option.

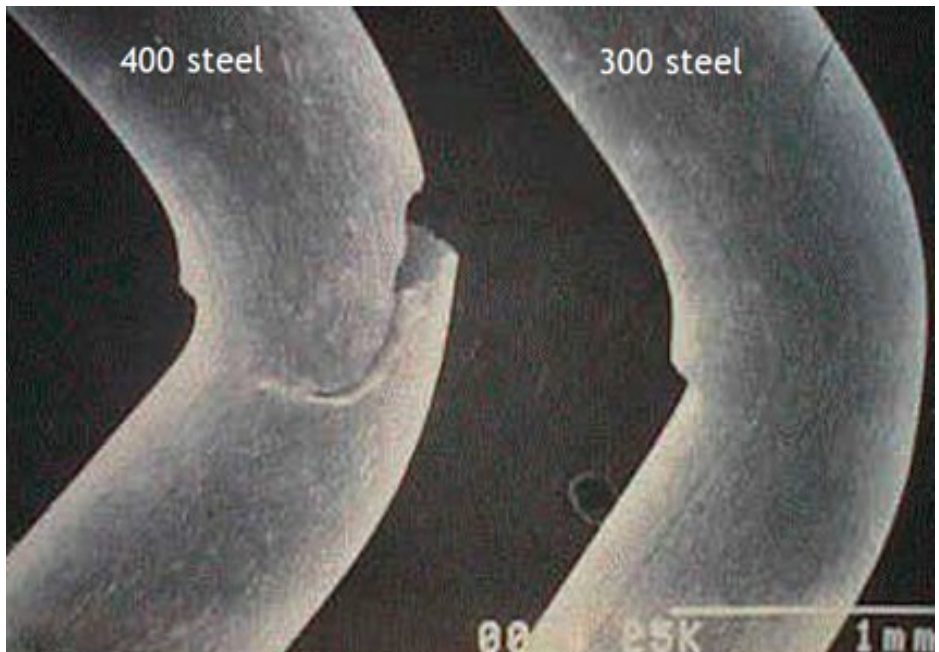
The same applies in veterinary clinics and again it is generally the more mundane articles that are prone to false economic decisions. A prime example is disinfectants whereby the 'cheaper' option needs to be used at a much stronger concentration, hence negating any perceived economic benefits.

The other prime example is in suture materials, especially needles! Sutures, and needles, can be high quality but also can be cheap and nasty. The amazing thing is that the price difference between them is actually very small. This is because of their small overall size making them actually the cheapest part of any operation.

Referral surgeons actually do not use the more economical cassettes for this very reason – they want absolute confidence in the suture line and will not sacrifice that for a few cents.

Which brings us to the needles themselves. One of the most frustrating things for any surgeon is swaged on needles snapping half way through the process. One does not need a degree in metallurgy, or even understand the terms martensitic and austenitic to realise that steel can come in vastly different grades, some much stronger and much more pliable than others.

(In short, martensitic has more carbon atoms and less chromium making a harder steel that is more cor-



rosive and less pliable. It has a place in construction but is not as suitable for fine suture needles).

The old adage 'you get what you pay for' certainly applies to steel, and suture needles in particular. When comparing budget airlines with mainstream carriers the price difference can be profound, but so can the experience. With suture needles the price difference is infinitesimal, yet the difference in user experience can be just as profound as in the airline analogy.

The price difference between top of the line suture needles and cheap imports is soon wiped away by the replacement cost of the suture

materials, it really is the ultimate example of false economy.

The following classes of stainless steel can be used for needles:

420 series: standard steel quality, martensitic, least ductility, lowest bending force.

455 series: improved 400 series quality, martensitic, improved ductility, higher bending force.

300 series: best steel quality, austenitic, highest ductility, highest bending force.

Although this quality is often only offered for cardiovascular surgery, Serag-Wiessner uses it for almost all its suture materials and all of its eye needles are made of 300 series stainless steel.

This generation of needles is characterised by optimal bending resistance, the best ductility, and excellent penetrating capability, which are all characteristics allowing the surgeon to work easily and confidently.

The tougher 300 series steel has a greater penetration force so, when cutting, causes minimum tissue

**"again it is generally the more mundane articles that are prone to false economic decisions."**

pack itself, and that is even before the cost of time is taken into account, not to mention the frustration levels for a busy surgeon.

It makes no sense to go for the cheap import when purchasing su-

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## False Economy

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trauma when compared to ordinary steel, as seen in the picture below.

Serag Wiessner Surgical Spring-eyed Needles have the following advantages: cutting edge on outside, stainless steel, spring eye for easier threading, high stability and optimal elasticity.

By a special hardening process both cutting edge and point are sharply ground to ensure that the needle has enough sharpness even after repeated use.

The austenitic stainless steel guarantees that no corrosion occurs during sterilization. The reverse cutting edge keeps tissue trauma low in comparison to needles with cutting edge inside.

And, being 300 series steel, i.e. austenitic, the needles are quite pliable and so far less prone to breaking.

This makes them a much more economic item than supposedly cheap imports, and that is before factoring in the frustration aspect!



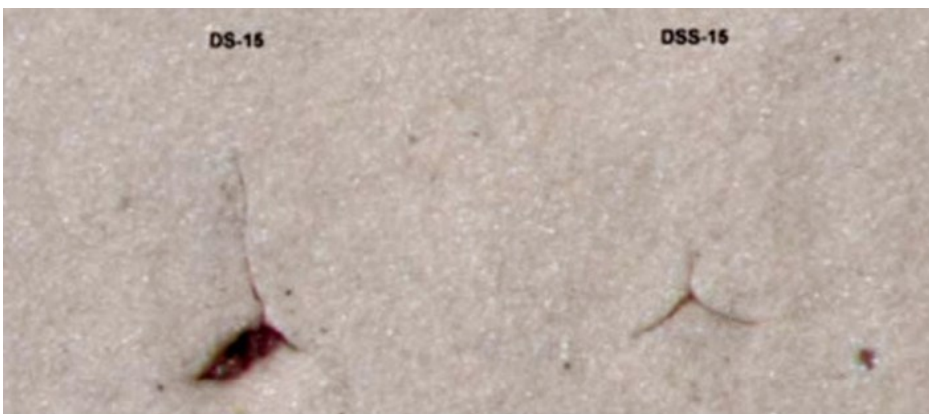
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Serag Wiessner is the world's oldest suture company and has represented quality since the 19th Century.

Thus, it is no accident that their suture materials are the best on the planet and, like all suture materials the cost per operation is the least expensive of the whole process.

Considering the dire consequences of failure, plus the cost on both time and money for breakages it makes little sense to go for supposedly cheap imports.

Picture the scenario; the surgeon is closing off and already looking forward to a coffee before the next job when, all of a sudden, the cheap shoddy needle snaps! The frustration is unbelievable, and all for a few cents in the overall scheme of things. It really is false economy.



## Watching Golf

Nagy is watching his first game of golf.

The player's first shot lands in the rough, and Nagy is quite impressed when he manages to get back onto the fairway.

However, the next shot lands in a bunker, but Nagy is even more impressed when the player chips out and onto the green.

Then when the player sinks his putt Nagy starts laughing and says, "I

can't wait to see how he hits the ball out of there!"

## Hunting

When drover Bill retired he set about fulfilling his dream of riding with the gentry at the hunt club.

He was told that his scruffy horse barely met the equestrian standard, and not to come back until he had his own hound.

Not to be deterred Bill fronted up for the Saturday hunt with his

trusty mount and his faithful greyhound.

He was grudgingly accepted, but he failed to tell the officials that his greyhound bitch was on heat.

Ten minutes after the chase started the Master of the Foxhounds turned to his companion and asked, "Which way are they headed?"

"West," was the reply.

"And where's the fox?"

"At the moment he's running seventh but gaining ground rapidly."



## Red Meat - The Future

A podcast on radio station The Country has been serialised in the NZ Herald, with some interesting data coming forward.

The three main points are: 1) the red meat industry faces challenges but remains optimistic about sustainability and growth opportunities, 2) Industry leaders emphasise “nature-positive” practices to enhance sustainability and 3) profitability, and New Zealand aims to elevate its food brand, emphasising flavour and innovation to compete globally.

Currently forestry is growing as farmers seek alternative revenues. High interest rates, energy prices and compliance costs have hit businesses hard.

Sheep are still big business. There were once 22 sheep for every citizen, with numbers peaking in 1982 at 70 million, and while numbers have fallen dramatically since then, forecast to be just under 24 million at the end of 2024, we still had a record 5 sheep per person.



There are 16,000 sheep and beef farms, and we remain the world's largest exporter of lambs. And even though headcount has plummeted, the total revenue for lamb has grown, reflecting an almost doubling of productivity since 1990. That's a result of better genetics, better farm management and smarter marketing.

It's a story repeated by other meats. According to FigureNZ, in the

last 20 years, beef exports have grown to \$4.6 billion from \$1.8 billion, yet the total herd has fallen from 4.7 to 3.6 million. Deer numbers have shrunk by a million to about 750,000, yet venison revenues have grown slightly. The meat sector has done a credible job of generating more value from less volume.

Behind those impressive numbers are worrying signs. A report from the industry body Beef+Lamb, released in September, showed that farm profit was forecast to decrease 7.4% to an average of just \$45,200 per farm. That's a whole lot of effort for very little return.

Since then, Beef + Lamb has released its mid-season update showing profitability had improved significantly, but it was still challenging for farmers, “as our revised forecast is 7% below the five-year average. Revenue is up 11.5%, while total farm expenditure is estimated to increase 3.8%.”

Once a miracle fibre, fulfilling half of New Zealand's exports, wool has been displaced by synthetic alternatives and is struggling for relevance. Since 2004 the export value of carpets and wool products has dropped by two-thirds.

With consumption falling among our traditional trading partners due to health and environmental concerns, can New Zealand's red meat sector flourish again? Get it right, and New Zealand could tap into a hungry market – after all, the world loves meat.

According to Coriolis, over 7.5 billion people across 195 countries eat meat, making it the sixth-largest food source by volume. The average

person consumes about 45 kg of meat per year, or roughly 123 grams per day. With an additional 1.5 billion consumers expected in the next 25 years, primarily in Africa and Asia, meat consumption is set to rise further.

**“this may all change with Trump's tariffs!”**

The Meat Industry Association says New Zealand's red meat sector recorded another strong month in February, with exports reaching \$1.1 billion - a 25% increase compared to February 2024.

The United States was the largest export market, increasing by 32% to \$339 million, while China rose 5% to \$278m. And the European Union also experienced significant growth, with beef and sheep meat exports rising. This reflects a general increase in the global demand for sheep meat and tight in-market inventories in the EU.

There was also a further recovery in sheep meat exports to China, while beef exports to Canada and the US increased. (this may all change with Trump's tariffs!)

In ‘Red meat challenges: Tech, environment, demand and China’, Tony Seba, the futurist from RethinkX (which predicts the collapse of traditional agriculture in the 2030s), said, “Just a small fall in profit can lead to extreme financial challenge across the sector and challenge the future viability of this sector for many.”

Most people find Seba's prognosis surprising, if not baffling. They find it hard to imagine that an industry so old, so established, and so im-

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## Red Meat - The Future

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portant could suffer a Kodak-like moment. Especially as meat consumption continues to grow globally.

The first opportunity is to drive sustainability beyond the idea of simply doing "less harm" to being a positive force for people and the planet. This is a "nature positive" programme of on-farm practices, quality assurance and consumer branding.

Early signs show that the meat attains a higher premium and plays well with major clients such as supermarkets and volume producers of ground beef. It aims to create positive effects on-farm, rewarding farmers for management practices such as encouraging native bush regeneration, fencing waterways, riparian planting and increasing farm biodiversity.

Sheep and beef farmers own a remarkable 24%, or 2.8 million hectares, of New Zealand's native bush, the largest outside of the conservation estate. The bush gives the sector an asset base to leverage for carbon and biodiversity credits and a powerful marketing story to fit its ambition "for clean freshwater

around farms, for the sector to be carbon neutral by 2050, for sheep and beef farms to provide habitats that support thriving biodiversity, and to support healthy productive soils," Beef + Lamb said.

The industry is pushing back on health criticism as well, arguing with nutritional science about the benefits of animal protein over alternatives.

With support from the Riddet Institute in Palmerston North and Professor Derrick Moot of Lincoln University, Beef + Lamb is on a major offensive to prove the longevity of meat-eating in human evolution and the health benefits to all ages when consumed in the right proportions and at the right time.

"Meat is a rich source of many key nutrients, including protein, iron, zinc and vitamin B12," it said in a 2020 report. "These are particularly essential in the diets of population groups with higher nutrient needs, including children, adolescents, pregnant women, athletes and older adults."

In fact, it argues we may not be eating enough. "Recent data from OECD-FAO shows New Zealanders are eating approximately 284g (221g

"After all, food is an emotional experience to most consumers."

beef, 63g lamb) per week. For those who only eat beef or lamb as their red meat choice, this is well below the recommended red meat intake of 350-500g per week advised by the Ministry of Health and World Cancer Research Fund."

New Zealand is well positioned to tell a good story about its red meat: grass-fed, free range, with one of the lowest footprints in its category. Our imagery, especially promoted by NZ Story, is bucolic: rolling pastures, blue skies, family farms, and deliciously plated meals.

After all, food is an emotional experience to most consumers.

## English Lesson

|               |                   |    |        |
|---------------|-------------------|----|--------|
| Tsunami...    | T                 | is | silent |
| Honest...     | H                 | is | silent |
| Psychology... | P                 | is | silent |
| Knife...      | K                 | is | silent |
| Wife...       | Husband is silent |    |        |

Class dismissed.

## Appropriate Right Now!

A Canadian couple was strolling through a park in London and sat down on a bench next to an elderly Briton.

The Brit noticed their lapel pins sporting the Canadian flag and, to make conversation, said "Judging by your pins, you must be Canadians".

"Indeed, we are", replied the Canadian gentleman.

"I hope you won't mind my asking,"

said the Brit, "but what do the two red bars on your flag represent?"

"Well," replied the Canadian gentleman, "one of the bars stands for the courage and hardiness of our people in settling the cold expanses and broad prairies of our country. The other is for the honesty and integrity for which Canadians are known."

The Brit mulled this over and nodded. Having poor eyesight at his

advanced age, and not being familiar with maple leaves, he then asked, "And what's that six-pointed item in the middle of your flag?"

"Oh, that's to remind us of the six words of our national motto," the Canadian lady piped up.

The Brit asked, "And what are those six words?"

The Canadian smiled and replied, "They are 'Don't blame us - we're not Americans.'"



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## Walking on Water

The Pope, the Dalai Lama and the Archbishop of Canterbury decide to go fishing, so they hire a boat and row out to the middle of the lake.

However it's a very hot day and within an hour or two all the beer is gone.

"Let's row back to the shore and get a carry-out from the local pub," says the Pope.

"No need for that," says the Dalai Lama, and he steps over the side of the boat and walks across the surface of the water to the shore, then goes to the pub.

Ten minutes later he's back with more beer. He walks across the water to the boat and steps inside.

Half an hour later they've run out of beer again.

This time the Pope says, "My turn!" He looks over the side of the boat and a big smile appears on his face.

Then he steps over and walks across the water to the shore. Ten minutes later he's back with yet more beer. Again, he walks across the water to the boat.

Half an hour later and the beer is again finished.

The Archbishop steps over the side of the boat and instantly sinks below the surface.

The other two drag him back aboard.

As he lies coughing and spluttering in the bottom of the boat, the Pope says, "Do, you think we should have told him about the stepping stones?"

