

## Cannabis for Equine Colic: Use by Late 19th Century Practitioners

Sesco Stewart, MD, DVS (Fig. 1), from Council Bluffs, Iowa, read a paper before the Nebraska Veterinary Medical Association's semiannual meeting on March 10, 1891, which "elicited a liberal discussion."<sup>1,2</sup> In it, he described his experiences with using cannabis indica, or Indian hemp, for treating colic in horses. While he noted human physicians had long used it for the relief of spasm and pain, there was only occasional mention in veterinary medicine. Finlay Dun (1830–1897), a British veterinary surgeon, had classed it as "a deliriant-narcotic anodyne and anti-spasmodic."<sup>3</sup>



**Figure 1. Sesco Stewart, MD, DVS (1855-1918),** dean of the Kansas City Veterinary College and president of the AVMA, 1902-1903. From: History of the AVMA, 1902. *J Am Vet Med Assoc.* 1961;1(2):adv 34.

Although available in shops as a coarse powder, tincture, fluid extract, and solid extract, Stewart preferred the fluid extract as the most reliable form. (Fig. 2) By giving one or two fluid drachm doses poured on the tongue from a small bottle, or by syringe into the mouth, he said the drug could be very conveniently administered with excellent absorption. While a single dose was often sufficient, he sometimes repeated it every 15–20 minutes or as required by each case. Dr. Stewart also thought "it is a safe drug to leave in the hands of attendants for administration."

The audience heard Stewart say, "I have used this drug in about fifty cases and it has not failed to do what I expected it to do, namely, relieve spasms and abdominal pain. I have discarded opium and chloral hydrate in this class of cases, and do not expect to resort to them so long as this agent serves me so faithfully. In simple spasmodic colic no other medicine is needed."

Nevertheless, "I would have you to understand that I do not recommend cannabis indica as a panacea for all cases of colic....but I do say that I have found it a certain agent for the relief of pain attendant upon bowel disturbances...." that "is always ready and easy [sic] of administration" without the side effects of opiates or chloral. (Figs. 3a,b,c)

Clearly, other practitioners in attendance were listening and willing to utilize this drug as noted by the number of colic cases written up in the *American Veterinary Review* for a number of years thereafter. In particular, a couple of years later, another speaker, Dr. Charles Williams, told his audience at the Pennsylvania State Veterinary Medical Association meeting in 1897,<sup>4</sup> "Of course I do not wish to be understood to recommend this drug as a panacea for all colics without any other treatment....But I will repeat, when a simple narcotic and anodyne is required cannabis indica is the drug *par excellence*, and I think if any of you have ever tried it, it will give you much satisfaction."

Not so many years later, in a 1917 book, *Practical Veterinary Pharmacology and Therapeutics*, Cornell University veterinary professor Dr. Howard J. Milks noted that<sup>5</sup> "Cannabis is Indicated for the Relief of Pain, Spasm and Nervous Irritability. It is superior to opium or morphine in equine practice and, although its action is not so rapid when given per os as morphine hypodermically. It is especially superior to opium or morphine for the relief of pain and spasm of the intestinal tract as it does not tend to cause constipation...."

### Who Was Dr. Sesco Stewart?

Dr. Stewart (1855–1918) was an important early member of the veterinary profession and one of the pillars of the Kansas City Veterinary College (KCVC).<sup>6,7,8,9,10</sup>

Born in Weston, Ontario, Canada, on March 23, 1855, Dr. Stewart moved to the United States while quite young. After obtaining his MD degree from Wooster University in Ohio in 1878, he set up his medical practice in Oakland, Iowa. Stew-



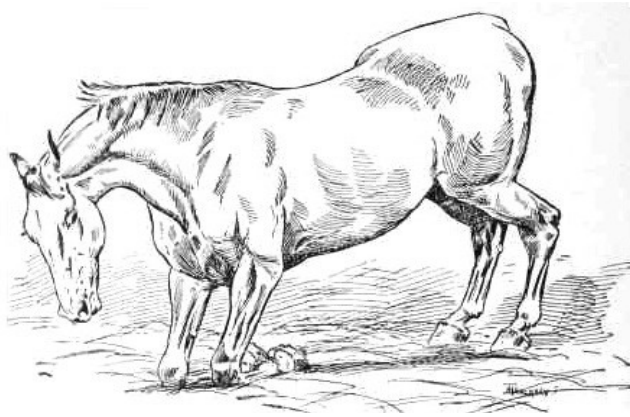
**Figure 2. Parke, Davis & Co. Cannabis Fluid Extract No. 598.** From: <http://www.herbmuseum.ca/content/parke-davis-co-cannabis-fluid-extract-no-598>

art subsequently graduated with a veterinary degree from Iowa State Agricultural College in 1885. Starting out in Atlantic, Iowa, Stewart located his veterinary practice in Council Bluffs, Iowa, from 1888 to 1891. Next, he was appointed as a veterinary inspector with the US Bureau of Animal Industry, first stationed in Omaha, followed by Nebraska City, then Kansas City.

In 1901, Dr. Stewart resigned from the government inspectorship to devote his whole time to the KCVC, in which he had been interested for some years. He began as an instructor in 1894, and when the school was reorganized in 1895, he was



**Figure 3a. Spasmodic colic (1)**



**Figure 3b. Spasmodic colic (2).**



**Figure 3c. Spasmodic colic (3). Horse rolling with pain.** From: Axe JW, ed. *The Horse: Its Treatment in Health and Disease with a complete guide to breeding, training and management*. Divisional Vol. II. The Gresham Publishing Company, 1906; pp. 279 (Fig. 100), 280 (Fig. 101), 281 (Fig. 102). *HathiTrust Digital Library*; <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/ncs1.ark:/13960/t7kp8k760>

the moving spirit in its reorganization. According to Eby,<sup>11</sup> Dr. Stewart's interest in animals other than the horse carried the KCVC forward, while other private veterinary institutions, in which everything had been staked upon the horse, began to founder and collapse. At the school, Dr. Stewart taught materia medica, therapeutics, helminthology, milk and dairy inspection, and meat inspection. He was made dean of the faculty and secretary-treasurer of the corporation serving in this capacity until he died on February 7, 1918. Upon his death, W. H. Hoskins said of him, "He seemed to have died too soon. His work was not finished."<sup>12</sup>

Active in the profession throughout his career, Dr. Stewart was a charter member of the Iowa Veterinary Medical Association and acted as its president and secretary from 1887 to 1892. After serving as secretary of the AVMA (1895–1902), he was elected president in 1902 and presided over the Association's first meeting in Ottawa, Canada, in September 1903. With his genuine interest and efforts in education, the inspection and accreditation of veterinary schools can justly be attributed to Stewart's efforts.<sup>13</sup>

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\*This Time-Bite was originally published on the Veterinary Information Network (<https://vin.com> [membership required]) on May 11, 2016.

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