

SYDNEY CDI

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Sydney International Equestrian Centre, Horsley Park



w: sydneycdi.com

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

SYDNEY CDI 2020: FEI VET, Dr. Mike Tomlinson.

The Sydney CDI 3* 2020 welcomes Dr C Mike Tomlinson (aka Dr Mike), as the FEI Veterinary Delegate for our event. In this interview, we learn about some of Dr Mike's professional achievements, his tips for competitors at major events, reveal his latest equine research project, share his most difficult challenges as a FEI equine vet, and his approach to achieving work/life balance.



Dr Mike became an avid horseperson in the fifth grade. From that point on his life has been focused on horses. Throughout high school he wanted to become an Agriculture teacher, but agriculture was disappearing from Southern California. Since he loved showing horses, after attending a constant variety of equestrian events it became evident that the only person consistently earning a living at horse events was the show veterinarian. And so, off to vet school Mike went, earning his Doctor of Veterinary Medicine degree from the University of California in Davis, USA.

His first job after picking up his diploma and veterinary license was at the 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles, where he worked on several of the competing horses. He then started in private veterinary practice limiting it to performance horses. Dr Mike officiated at more and more FEI events and all appeared well until returning from the Stockholm World Equestrian Games, when several of his best clients explained that he cannot be gone for six weeks straight for the events – he had to choose

between traditional veterinary practice and doing the events. Since he had been consulting with several businesses on how they could better run their companies, it was clear which way he had to go.

So it was back to school again, this time earning his Masters of Business Administration. He was hired as the Chief Financial Officer for one of the business with which he had previously been consulting, getting in writing the proviso that he would have adequate time off to attend the equestrian events. This proviso has continued ever since, starting businesses and hiring on as the CFO, CTO, COO, GM, or CEO of numerous corporations, both in the horse world (such as SmartPak, Game Ready and KER) and outside the horse world too, in fields such as medical devices, manufacturing, and environmental remediation.

Dr Mike has worked at up to 30 FEI events each year since 1984. He has been Chef d'Equipe, Team Vet, or Veterinary Delegate for events big and small including five World Equestrian Games and numerous World Championships in many disciplines. He was the President of the Veterinary Commission I for the World Equestrian Games in Tryon, SC, USA. He is an FEI Vet for the disciplines of Dressage, Endurance, Eventing, Vaulting, Para Dressage, and Jumping. Dr Mike is also an FEI Steward, and a FEI 'O' Judge and Technical Delegate in Endurance. He is a FEI Course Director for FEI Veterinarians and also for FEI Endurance Officials, Vets, and Treatment Vets. While his companies have caused him to live in many parts of the USA, now he can choose where his companies are located, so he lives in Thousand Oaks, CA with the great year 'round weather and proximity to LAX.

Advise for competitors at major events:

With your vast experience in WEG and Olympic events globally; what advice do you have to pass on for our Olympic hopefuls at the Sydney CDI or other competitors with their sites on major competition in the future?

The answer for the most important recommendation for those going to a major event: "You got to the top by doing things right, the Olympics (or WEG or Championship) is no place to try out something new."

I have been Chef d'Equipe or Team Vet for over 20 major championship events. At nearly every event, at least one of the team members tried something new, a new article of tack, new clothing for themselves, or even a new feed or supplement. Epic failure at the most important moment.

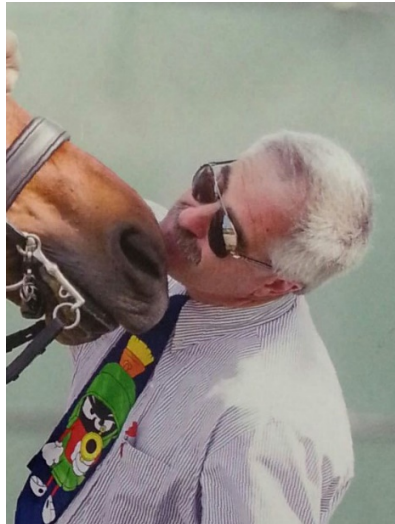
Competitors should test these things out at home or at other minor events, long before the championship. Never try something untested at a pinnacle event.

Current Practice Issues & Research

What has been your most rewarding experience as a FEI vet?

One of the most rewarding parts of being a FEI Vet is the opportunity to be the Team Veterinarian for a nation's equestrian team. While usually this is a thankless job, especially financially, it also has the potential to be the most emotionally rewarding experience.

Being a key part of the Team supporting athletes to the highest pinnacle of their life is something few people get to realize. For example, using your veterinary knowledge and skill to diagnose a treatable malady just before a championship such that the horse that wins the Gold Medal could not have prevailed had you not been there. Knowing that your individual action enabled your country to bring home the Gold is a good feeling.



Veterinary fatigue through euthanasia related stress has been a topic of concern in Australia for students through to experienced professionals, how have you managed that issue?

Being an FEI Vet also comes with some very unfortunate times. The worst of which is when you have to tell a competitor that their life-long best friend needs to be put down. This is possibly the most stressful time for the vet. You must be absolutely certain that you have tried everything, thought of all possibilities, communicated to everyone effectively, documented everything perfectly, and done everything with compassion and dignity. You are not just irreversibly ending a life, but also creating life-long memories for all involved. If everything does not go perfectly, that will be what is remembered forever.

In answer to the professional burnout/compassion fatigue question, every person is different. I feel far too deeply about my clients and their owners for me to be able to perform euthanasia frequently. I migrated my practice into a sport horse practice because I could not remain compassionate and energized about work if I continued doing backyard practice where I was putting horses down due to owner ignorance or lack of money.

Understand that while a vet has the ability to make the greatest improvement to horses' lives in backyard practice, I could not personally flourish doing it. Every veterinarian must determine their own needs and then decide what type of practice is best suited to them.

Is there a specific issue or topic that you would feel passionate about and would like to comment on / or inform the Australian Dressage Community (veterinary or competitor) about?

When asked about a passion of mine in the horse industry, I would say that it is the changing ratio of Horsemen vs. Riders. A rider is someone who calls ahead to have the staff get the horse saddled and ready, and then step out of their car and onto the horse, simply dropping the reins when done and driving away. Riders may know how to get the horse to jump higher on a good day but are totally lost when the horse is having a bad day due to something like a new stall neighbour, a change in grain source, or ill-fitting tack.

A horseperson is someone who knows about the horse by spending time around them, finding out firsthand what goes in the front and what comes out the other end. Horsemen understanding their horses' moods, their likes and dislikes, and what makes them happy.

The change that worries me most is that decades ago nearly everyone grew up with horses or at least started by spending a lot of time with their horse. At that time the lone non-horseperson rider was an oddity. These days the ratio has almost reversed.

As a show organizer or feed store owner, this probably would not be too impactful. But as a veterinarian, I am now too often called in to alleviate what ignorance has caused. Having owners call about inane things but not call when it is really needed impacts both me and the horses greatly. I do not see this trend reversing anytime soon.

I realize that our lives have changed and probably will never go back. The real losers in this are not just the horse, but the many people who were so deeply helped by being close to their horse.

Are there any equine research projects that you are currently working on?

I have several ongoing research projects currently involving horses. One pilot study that I am just starting is attempting to scientifically validate that riding horses enables people to reprocess past trauma resulting in a reduction of subjective distress and a more adaptive encoding of the trauma memory.

This research is based on the theory of adaptive information processing (AIP) using alternating bilateral stimulation (BLS) and is to be measured using McNair's POMS test. The theorized outcome is expected to show that the bilateral stimulation from normal horseback riding is sufficient to assist with reprocessing of past trauma in socio-normal riders.

If this is validated in a much larger full study, then an exciting implication is the benefit to not just the individual riders who we know have significant trauma histories, but to also demonstrate the ways everyday riders build resilience and prevent their everyday "small-t traumas" from backing up on them, boosting overall mental health and well-being of riders.

Achieving Balance

How do you maintain balance between your wide range of FEI commitments, private practice and family?

Horses are not my vocation or my hobby, horses are a way of life; my work and life are inseparably intertwined. I no longer handle emergencies in my veterinary practice, simply because I am not in town. When I tell my clients that I cannot see their horse until next Tuesday, they know that is because I am flying back Monday evening.

To keep my life in balance, I try to be sure to communicate with my partner, my family, friends, clients, and co-workers just the same as if I were at home. With better Internet most everywhere now, I can use my mobile phone around the world, texting, emailing, calling people such that even my closest acquaintances usually first ask, "Where are you and what time of day is it there?"

I am extremely energetic, and try to stay away from caffeine so I do not go too fast. I wake up every morning excited about what can be achieved that day. I do not get jet-lag and have no worries about being in a different time zone every day, so I am well-suited to my lifestyle and thrive on the change each day brings. In high school I earned money stacking 70 kg bales of hay. I still enjoy doing so, but now it is called "exercise" instead of "work."

Being a medical professional, I understand the importance of eating well and sleeping well, as these minimum requirements are the foundation for everything else. But even if you do the basics right, there is more that must be done.

The true fundamental answer to not burning out and living a healthy life is to consciously decide what is good for you that you enjoy, and find a way to have that be more and more of your life. In order to achieve balance, strive to minimize the negative and maximize what you do enjoy. I have learned that I love working with and helping people, being close to and helping animals, travelling to new places, and constantly being challenged and learning new things. My lifestyle now reflects those passions. That is my balance.



Connect with Dr Mike

If you are looking to learn from a highly experienced, international, multi-disciplinary, FEI vet with a larger than life character as famous as his cartoon ties, take the opportunity to say hello to Dr Mike at the Sydney CDI3*2020. You will find Dr Mike from the event 'trot up' right through until his presentation on FEI veterinary rule changes and all matters equine at the Educational Workshop on Sunday!

Tickets for the event have already gone on sale, and seats for the ever-popular Saturday evening Grand Prix Freestyle to Music event and Educational Workshop on Sunday are selling out fast. For more information about the event or to purchase tickets, visit the event website at:

www.sydneycdi.com

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