



MAKING SURGICAL RECOVERY SAFER FOR CAMELIDS

Because of their unique body structure, llamas and alpacas face health challenges that other companion animals don't. Their long necks can complicate medical treatment, particularly when anesthetic gases need to be administered. A long tube must be inserted into the animal's airway, a process called intubation. This allows the patient to breathe oxygen and gas during surgery. Intubation moves structures at the back of the animal's throat, which, in turn, can result in complications upon removal of the tube.

Dr. Tamara Grubb says, "A llama would normally put those structures back in place by swallowing. If they're too sleepy, though, they don't swallow when the tube is taken out. That's when they get an airway obstruction."

In a Foundation-funded study, Dr. Grubb and her colleagues at Oregon State University have identified two anesthetic gases, sevoflurane and desflurane, that produce a more rapid recovery, which allows the animal's reflexes to take over. The quicker transition from breathing through the tube to breathing through the nose is less risky for the animal.

"Sevoflurane and desflurane are common, but they're not the everyday gases yet," says Dr. Grubb. She thinks that will change and believes the gases are suitable for most surgical procedures. Veterinarians with the right equipment can use Dr. Grubb's recommended dosages immediately.

To learn more, please refer to the paper Dr. Grubb published in the Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association. The reference is: Grubb TL, Schlipf JW, Riebold TW, Cebra CK, Poland L, Zawadzka X, Mailhot N. Minimum alveolar concentration of sevoflurane in spontaneously breathing llamas and alpacas. J Am Vet Med Assoc 2003;223(8):1167-1169.

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