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Second Century Fund

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calm the mare when we treat the foal. We have to make sure that she can see it at all times during treatment, otherwise she may become frantic.

If the mare cannot accompany her foal then a foster mare may be brought in to nurse the animal. "These mares are usually very placid and will accept a strange foal," she said. "Though we do have to fool her a bit by putting a scent on the foal and into her nostrils."

The stay at New Bolton Center for a septicemic foal can be a long one. However, Dr. Vaala explained, owners are willing to spend the time and money to save a valuable future race or breeding animal.

The unit does not only see foals with septicemia. Each year a number of very young animals with botulism are seen. This disease, caused by the toxin of the spore forming Clostridium bacteria used to be fatal. "We now have an antitoxin which can be given to the animal," Dr. Vaala said. "It will not cure the disease but will stop its progress." Botulism causes an animal to be weak and uncoordinated, it cannot swallow and in advanced cases the breathing is affected. "Such animals need great care and supportive treatment. They have to be sustained until their body has regenerated the nerve endings affected by the toxin. It is a long and labor-intensive process." The staff at New Bolton works with these foals extensively. They are given physical therapy, they are held in a sling to enable them to attempt to stand and they are carried outdoors if the weather is nice. "We use the respirator for these animals and we have been able to pull them through," she said.

Another type of patient seen in the neonatal unit is the "dummy" foal. These foals are normal at birth but within the first twenty four hours they suddenly become disoriented and forgetful. They don't nurse and they wander around the stall. They quickly weaken and require intensive care. "It is believed that this condition, neonatal maladjustment syndrome, is caused by oxygen deprivation during birth," she explained. "Brain cells die and this causes the foal's behavior. If the damage is not too severe, these animals can be saved through intensive supportive therapy."

The neonatal unit at New Bolton Center is small but plans to build a larger unit as part of the new intensive care unit are being completed.