

Understanding Vet Lingo

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Submitted to Cattle Business Magazine, August, 2014

How often have you had conversations with your veterinarian that end with you nodding your head in agreement, when in fact you have no idea what they actually said? I have to admit, when I'm listening to someone talk about subjects such as proteogenomics or molecular sequencing, I may have that very same glazed-over look. This month let's look at a few terms commonly used in cattle health that may cause some confusion.

BSE is a term that has two very different meanings in the animal health world. A **Breeding Soundness Exam** is performed on animals such as bulls and heifers, which will help identify potential healthy, competent breeding animals prior to entering the breeding season. A BSE will consist of a physical exam and, in the case of bulls, a semen evaluation. A **BSE test** is a test for bovine spongiform encephalopathy, or "mad cow disease," and is performed on deceased animals by taking a brain stem sample from the carcass.

A **carrier** animal is one who carries an infectious organism in their body, but are not currently showing clinical signs of disease. Carriers can be difficult to identify through diagnostic testing since they may or may not actually be shedding the organism at time of examination. Examples of diseases which have carrier states include anaplasmosis and bovine leucosis virus (BLV). Similarly, a **shedder** is an animal who is actively shedding infectious organisms, usually through bodily fluids such as feces, urine, or respiratory secretions. A shedder also may or may not be showing clinical signs. An example of a shedder would be an animal with subclinical Johne's disease – cattle often look normal but may be shedding large amounts of infectious organism in their feces, posing a risk to other animals in the herd.

In describing bovine viral diarrhea (BVD), a disease which can have major economic impacts on herd health, the term **PI**, or persistently infected, is used to describe animals that had been exposed to and infected by the virus while still in the dam's uterus. A PI animal was born infected, and will remain infected for the rest of its life. PI animals may or may not show outward clinical signs, have variable shedding rates, and are often referred to as carriers or shedders. In contrast, the term **transiently infected** is used to describe animals exposed and infected with an organism (not just BVD) at some point during its life, but infection is usually short-term and the animal often recovers if enough immunity is built up. Transient infections are often the ones we see when an infected animal comes in contact with a healthy animal who then becomes ill for a short period of time. Short term illnesses in stocker cattle attributed to "shipping fever" pathogens are often transient infections, with animals either recovering or succumbing to illness. A PI animal in a herd can cause others to have transient infections, but a transiently infected animal can never cause a PI state in a herd mate.

Finally, **ADR**, or “Ain’t doing right” is a term used when an animal may have non-specific clinical signs of illness such as off-feed, lethargy, or other unusual mannerisms. This is a term used when a diagnosis of her condition hasn’t been made. In contrast, **BAR** can be used to describe an animal who is otherwise bright, alert, and responsive to their surroundings. BAR is often used when describing a healthy animal, or an animal that may be down due to a musculoskeletal injury, but eating, drinking, and otherwise healthy.

These are just a few examples of terms used in animal health that may cause confusion. Good communication is essential in a valid VCPR (**veterinary-client-patient relationship**), and both veterinarians and producers need to work together to relay important information to each other to ensure herd health. Next month we’ll explore the meaning of a VCPR, and how having a good VCPR will benefit the industry as a whole.