When references are made to early modern veterinary care in England, they generally consist of commonplaces based on the portrayal of animals as being treated by ignorant, one-dimensional and even dangerous quacks. According to a number of modern historians, before the foundation of the first English Veterinary College in 1792, the ‘most fortunate sick animals’ in early modern England were those ‘left untreated’.

There are serious flaws in such thinking, the first being that simple common sense dictates that societies where animals play such a major role must have a system for protecting their health for economic reasons. Secondly, that they ignore the existence of moral arguments about the care of animals. It may be that the reason for such commonplaces it that many historians still apply out-dated research methods based on the ‘medical discoveries and elite practitioners’ approach of the early twentieth century. For human medicine, this resulted in a focus on the credulity and eccentric behaviour of early modern practitioners versus that of the educated, scientific ‘medical man’. Although historians of

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human medicine have long since abandoned such ideas in favour of an exploration of socio-cultural dimensions, such themes are still evident in modern works on animal health care.\(^5\)

The strongest evidence of the presence of a system of health care for early modern animals, however, lies in the wealth of contemporary, English language texts on the subject. There were two main categories of such publications, actual books and ephemeral literature such as almanacs. This essay will discuss the various types of popular veterinary literature available in order to illustrate the existence of an organized, easily accessible structure of animal health care in early modern England.

**Popular veterinary literature**

Medical advice, in the form of preventative and remedial health care, appeared in various types of publications in early modern England. They ranged from erudite volumes in Latin and Greek aimed at a professional readership through ‘popular’ (i.e. written in the vernacular) books and pamphlets written for a broader audience. Until the early seventeenth century, the majority of printed medical works were in Latin.\(^6\) This would have made them accessible to a small part of the population, mainly men who were university educated. The primary audience for Latin medical books were members of the College of Physicians whose classical education would have included Latin, and sometimes Greek. Their *Statuta Moralia* of 1647 stipulated that all admission exams were to remain in Latin, as was all bedside conversation between physicians.\(^7\) Presumably this was thought to be an important component of the consultation ritual, and contributed to the mystique of such an event.

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\(^{7}\) Axtell J.L., “Education and Status” 150.