



Ensuring Success and Safety Through Veterinary Care at the 2026 FEI World Cup™ Finals With PBEC's Dr. Christopher Elliott

Palm Beach Equine Clinic (PBEC) was at the center of top equestrian sport this winter, and their schedule culminated at the prestigious FEI World Cup™ Finals on April 8-13, in Fort Worth, TX, where Dr. Christopher Elliott served as the veterinary service manager at the FEI World Cup™ Finals, one of the sport's most prestigious international championships.

PBEC's expertise extended into the dressage arena, where Dr. Weston Davis and Dr. Sidney Chanutin support top horses, including those representing Zen Elite Equestrian Center, title sponsor of the FEI Dressage World Cup™ Final.

Dr. Christopher Elliott was born and raised in Brisbane, Australia, and graduated from the University of Queensland's School of Veterinary Science in 2007 with first-class honors. Since then, he has become board-certified in Sports Medicine and Rehabilitation. Dr. Elliott has worked at Fédération Équestre Internationale (FEI) events in more than 20 countries. In addition to being a dedicated FEI Veterinarian, Dr. Elliott has been a Private Athlete Veterinarian, Team Veterinarian, Permitted Treating Veterinarian, and Official Veterinarian. Dr. Elliott has been the Veterinary Services Manager for FEI competition at Wellington International for the past four editions of the Winter Equestrian Festival, and he has served at four Olympic Games. This was Dr. Elliott's first FEI World Cup™ Finals.



At his first FEI World Cup™ Finals, Dr. Christopher Elliott of PBEC served as the Veterinary Services Manager. Photo courtesy of Dr. Christopher Elliott

What are your responsibilities at the 2026 FEI World Cup™ Finals?

I'm the Veterinary Services Manager, so my role is to make sure that everything goes in the right place, at the right time. I'm the middle person who coordinates and communicates among the treating veterinarians, the various national federation team veterinarians, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) veterinarians, as well as the FEI Veterinary Director from the head office in Lausanne, Switzerland, and the Chair of the FEI Veterinary Commission. At these big championships, you have a lot of veterinarians because everything has to go well, and we all have our different roles.



Groom Sean Vard with Lorde arriving from the airport into quarantine. Photo courtesy of Dr. Christopher Elliott

What is the key to success for you and the veterinary team at an international championship event like this?

The key to this show's success is the USDA quarantine "bubble to bubble" in and out of Europe. All horses arriving from Europe have a 42-hour strict biosecurity quarantine under the control of the USDA. This is typically completed at permanent, dedicated equine quarantine facilities.

Here at the FEI World Cup™ Finals, a temporary quarantine protocol was created on-site within the international stables.

A huge amount of planning goes into the creation of an on-site, post-arrival quarantine protocol as is managed under strict USDA supervision. Twice-daily temperatures and veterinary exams are undertaken, and blood samples are acquired. All horses must also be vaccinated with a tick treatment. For the first 42 hours, six USDA veterinarians were on-site, in addition to two treating veterinarians and three FEI veterinary delegates.

Once all quarantine blood results have been confirmed negative, the European horses are released from their strict quarantine. For the rest of the show, they remain separate from what we define as the "domestic horses," which are all other FEI horses that have already been residing in the United States. They have separate barns, training times, and walking areas – a completely separate system that allows the European horses to fly into the U.S., compete, and fly back to Europe, where they can then be released directly into Europe without having to undergo quarantine there, which is called traveling "bubble to bubble."



International horses were stabled separately from domestic horses based in the U.S. Photo courtesy of Dr. Christopher Elliott

What do veterinary services look like at this event?

There are four groups of veterinarians at this event:

1. FEI Veterinary Commission delegates who control the FEI veterinary rules and oversee the overall wellbeing of these horses;
2. USDA veterinarians who enforce the disease management and biosecurity quarantine protocols;
3. The treating veterinary team of four, led by me; and
4. The six national veterinarians from European national federations who support their riders directly, along with the U.S. dressage and the U.S. jumping team veterinarians. Right now, there are 15 veterinarians for 65 horses.

What does a typical competition day look like for you?

Today, I arrived at 6:30 a.m. to check all the horses and touch base with all the team vets. I make sure that the horses are happy and healthy, then deploy my treating veterinarians to the training areas and the competition arena. We check the stables; we make sure horses at the rings are in good condition. We communicate with the riders and grooms to make sure they are following the USDA rules.

When competition starts, the four treating veterinarians, including me, are stationed at the competition arena, the warm-up arena, and the stables; one veterinarian is roaming between those three areas and able to assist wherever needed.



Dr. Elliott's team of treating veterinarians oversaw all areas of the competition, including the warm-up arena. Photo courtesy of Dr. Christopher Elliott

We also have two horse ambulances on-site, so we check in with them every day. One of our planning protocols for this event was to determine where the horse ambulances would park, how they access the main ring and the different stables, and which referral veterinary hospital we would work with, just in case we need to send a horse there. On the opening day of competition, we had jumping in the early afternoon and then dressage in the evening. The treating veterinarians rotate between our different locations between classes. Today, I also sat down at the computer and completed the export health papers for the horses returning to Europe.

What's it like having a front-row seat to the best jumpers and dressage horses?

It's the best job in the world, supporting these amazing athletes.

What is the most challenging thing about working at championship events?

The most challenging part of this show is the USDA quarantine. Temporary pop-up USDA facilities are challenging to manage for a variety of different reasons. It's vitally important that all protocols are strictly adhered to in order to ensure the health of both the arriving European horses as well as the domestic U.S.-based horses.

Planning for a quarantine facility like this takes more than 18 months of preparation. Serious consequences can happen if we don't follow the protocols perfectly. That's why we have such a large veterinary team here, why we educate the grooms and the riders about their responsibilities, and why we have everything in place.



Part of Dr. Elliott's duties included scanning horse microchips at the horse inspections. Photo courtesy of Dr. Christopher Elliott

How do you work with grooms and riders regarding the quarantine?

We tell them the rules for what they need to do. We tell them exactly where they can and can't be, at what time, and what their protocols are.

Do you feel more pressure at events like this? Or are you used to it by now?

I'm fine with it now, but the whole of the FEI equestrian world is watching this, and 100% of that is very high pressure. This is also our first step toward the 2028 Los Angeles Olympic Games. This event demonstrates to the USDA and FEI that our veterinary protocols for horses flying into the United States are viable and ready for L.A.

What do you wish more people knew about your job at events?

These shows can require years of prior planning on the veterinary side. Planning for this show began 18 months ago, and we have to make sure that the show runs perfectly, both in the show ring and in the "back of the house." It's a very high-profile event, so above all else, we need to make sure that horse wellbeing is at the forefront of what we do.

Learn more about Palm Beach Equine Clinic and our team of veterinarians at www.EquineClinic.com.

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