

Pain relief from man to lamb

By MARIUS CUMING

THE WOMAN behind the mulesing pain relief product Tri-Solfen is now tackling pain relief in other sheep and cattle operations.

"There have been tremendous developments in the area of pain relief for humans and it can be adapted to the farm in a practical and economic way," Dr Meredith Sheil said.

Having developed the first pain relief product for the sheep industry she now hopes others will help pick up the mantle.

"Most people don't hold the extreme views of the animal rights groups, still, they don't like to see animals in pain," she said.

"If we want to keep up with consumer standards of humane animal care, we have to find simple affordable ways of treating pain in our animals."

While she said pain relief alone was not the long-term answer to mulesing, it had been widely adopted and was the best option available until a more effective cure could be found.

"I wish we didn't have to perform heart surgery on children or drill teeth but until something better comes along we have to have these procedures. Pain relief is always just a stepping stone, sometimes a short one, sometimes a long one."

The paediatrician, doctor and superfine woolgrower at Ilford, near Bathurst in NSW used her experience managing painful wounds in children, to develop the pain-relief spray for mulesing.

"I used to soak children's wounds with topical anaesthetic to numb them before stitching them up," she said.

For lambs she put the same local anaes-



■ Superfine woolgrower and paediatrician Dr Meredith Sheil developed the pain relief product Tri-Solfen and is now looking at alleviating pain associated with other livestock operations.

thetic agents into a gel that sticks to the wound so that the agents continue to act and deliver pain relief over a number of hours.

From testing results, Dr Sheil believes Tri-Solfen offers more than eight hours pain alleviation and its success stems from its ability to stop an entire chain reaction of responses to pain.

"After you first receive a cut a number of reactions occur from the initial activity of the nerve endings being severed to inflammation and swelling, which makes the pain escalate.

"Stopping the first response seems to prevent a large amount of the pain escalation," she said.

So encouraging have been the results, Australian Wool Innovation chairman Ian McLachlan himself has been impressed.

"I have used it and there is no doubt it is good, but it is not a solution to the mulesing problem," he said.

But mulesing is just one painful operation, it represents the start of a new era in animal management.

Dr Sheil believes that there are many other procedures in animals that cause a lot of pain that could be better managed.

"Castration is also highly painful, particularly with elastic rings. They inflict an enormous amount of acute pain. Imagine putting

a rubber band tightly around the tip of your finger and leaving it there until your finger falls off."

And if you think she is developing new products for commercial gain, think again.

"It cost a lot of money to develop Tri-Solfen. If I knew what the costs were going to be I'm not sure that I would have gone ahead. Luckily, I was very naive."

Now that it has been widely adopted, it has helped the developers recover costs and they are pushing on to look at ways of performing mulesing and other husbandry procedures painlessly.

Dr Sheil is not concerned by the industry commitment to phase out surgical mulesing by 2010.

"We cannot stop mulesing until we have an effective alternative, just like we cannot stop open heart surgery until we have an effective alternative, it's as simple as that."

From her observations she believes that castration with a rubber ring inflicts far more pain than mulesing and it is for this reason that she sees a problem with the mulesing clips currently being developed by AWI.

"The injectable appears to be the great white hope but knowing about the very long and involved process of registering chemicals and overcoming occupational health and safety concerns, residue issues and so on I can't see how AWI can possibly have a commercial product ready, and everyone trained to use it by 2010," she said.

"Hopefully the industry will find a real solution. In the meantime, we have Tri-Solfen and we are looking at additional pain relief options.

"That makes our sheep the most humanely treated farm animals in the world. We should be proud of that."