

EMBARGO: 20.00hrs Thursday 22 September 2011

BVA PRESIDENT MR HARVEY LOCKE'S PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

BVA Congress 2011
Royal College of Physicians, London

~CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY~

Members of the Association, ladies and gentlemen,

I am delighted to address you this evening as we open BVA Congress in World Veterinary Year, celebrating the 250th anniversary of the first veterinary school in Lyon, France.

Although we can't claim the birth of the profession for ourselves here in the UK, we can and should be very proud of our history.

The veterinary profession has come a long way since 1761 and in that time has adapted and changed a huge amount.

Vet 2011 is just one reason why I chose 'Vets in a changing world' as the theme for my presidential year, recognising the fact that politically and economically we live in the midst of enormous fluctuation.

At such milestones it is worth pausing and reflecting. Looking back at our achievements and our failures and striving to learn from both.

There can be no greater achievement for our profession than the eradication of disease. It is fitting, therefore, that Vet 2011 coincides with the official declaration of the eradication of rinderpest. This extraordinary achievement of our veterinary colleagues will be explored in tomorrow's Wooldridge Memorial Lecture, which will be delivered by Dr Peter Roeder, former Secretary of the Global Rinderpest Eradication Programme at FAO.

To mark the occasion I am also delighted to welcome Dr Tjeerd Jorna, President of the World Veterinary Association, and Dr Bob McCracken, representing the Commonwealth Veterinary Association. They understand, better than most, the role of vets across the globe in disaster relief, in research, and in securing our food supplies; subjects that will be examined during the BVA's Overseas Group sessions throughout tomorrow.

BVA Congress is perhaps best known for our political debates – a unique event in the veterinary calendar.

This year we are very pleased to welcome Minister of State for Agriculture and Food Jim Paice to deliver a keynote address 'Vets and the Big Society', setting out what the government wants from the veterinary profession in these austere times. This will be followed by views from three vets from different strands of the profession describing how they see the profession meeting the challenges.

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While I don't want to prejudge the Minister's speech, from the BVA's perspective we know that the Government values us as a critical friend.

Over the year I have been asked to brief the Secretary of State on the veterinary viewpoint on a number of occasions, on bovine TB, with BCVA, and on pet travel, with BSAVA. At these times Caroline Spelman has made it clear that the veterinary input is valued as a vital element in Defra's decision-making.

In this changing world we have also had our difficulties with the direction being taken by the government; and we have been at the forefront of holding ministers and government agencies to account.

As the budget headlines of the Comprehensive Spending Review become the reality of cuts we are acutely aware of the impact on our colleagues in state employment and those in private practice supplying services to the government.

The Animal Health VLA merger in April was a significant event, and the need for the new agency to find ongoing savings will have repercussions for the profession for years to come.

Earlier this week AHVLA revealed its plans for TB testing procurement by tender and in recent weeks we learned of financial cuts to be made in the veterinary laboratory network.

In the face of these changes the BVA has consistently made it clear that the veterinary surveillance network must not be compromised.

These challenges are common to all parts of the UK but because animal health and welfare budgets are devolved to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, the responses are different.

BVA presence in the regions of the UK has never been more important. This year we have seen Scottish Branch go from strength to strength and we have initiated closer working with colleagues in Northern Ireland. Perhaps most significantly we also re-established a Welsh Branch, under the presidency of Bob Stevenson.

We held very successful lobbying dinners in London, Belfast, Edinburgh and Cardiff and had constructive meetings with the newly elected ministers in Wales and Northern Ireland.

Again this year we welcome the four Chief Veterinary Officers of the UK to a panel discussion on Saturday morning to debate and discuss their different approaches to animal health and welfare.

They have chosen the theme of Europe to kick-start the discussions. Every Member State is now gearing up for the incoming EU Animal Health Law and policies from Europe will continue to drive much of the UK's animal health and welfare activity.

I'm very pleased to welcome Dr Christophe Buhot, President of the Federation of Veterinarians of Europe. BVA continues to work very closely with FVE on European matters, such as the changes to pet travel rules, antimicrobial resistance and the profession's ambition for improved welfare at slaughter and the labelling of meat from non-stunned slaughter.

I have been involved with FVE for many years and I know all too well that if we really want to influence veterinary and animal health policy at home, we have to start in Brussels.

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Europe has the power to alter the way we practise. Earlier this year the BVA and FVE had to act swiftly to see off moves in the European Parliament to restrict the ability of vets to dispense veterinary medicines. We won the battle but it is likely that the war will be ongoing.

On pet travel the BVA and BSAVA continued to work very closely with Defra, FVE, and colleagues from Veterinary Ireland to secure the right level of protection for the UK and Ireland from rabies and tapeworms. Our science-led approach has gained a sympathetic ear in the European Commission and we are close to winning the argument on measures to keep *Echinococcus multilocularis* out of our country.

I'm again very pleased to welcome Dr Pat Kirwan, President of Veterinary Ireland.

Whether we look across the Irish Sea, the English Channel or right across the globe it is important to learn from our colleagues practising in other countries.

The UK enjoys membership of IVOC – the International Veterinary Officers Council. Last year we hosted colleagues from Canada, the USA, South Africa, New Zealand, and Australia here in the UK and I look forward to another successful meeting in a couple of weeks. I'm delighted that Dr René Carlson, President of AVMA, and Dr Lloyd Keddie, President of CVMA, are here with us this evening.

I was also very fortunate to visit annual veterinary Congresses in New Zealand and America. My overriding sense is that we are all facing the same issues from increased regulation and scrutiny to the impact of growing graduate debt.

So it's important that we learn from our international colleagues, just as we – as professionals – learn from our peers, formally through CPD and informally through our professional networks and associations.

As a BVA Officer I have had the privilege of meeting and working with vets from every sector of our profession; it has been a stimulating and eye-opening experience.

One of my goals for the year was to cement the positive relationship between the BVA and our divisions, which began by holding a forum on working together. It is an ongoing process but we have made progress.

There are many examples, but I want to touch on just a few.

This Congress is being delivered in association with BSAVA, who have arranged an excellent scientific programme across Friday and Saturday; helping the BVA to fulfil its commitment to provide excellent, affordable CPD for members.

I would like to pay tribute to the officer team of BCVA for the work we have done together on the sensitive issue of tendering for OV work, and the enormous amount of work we have done to provide a robust, scientific response to the two Defra consultations on a proposed badger cull to tackle bovine TB.

With BEVA officers we have been tackling the complex issue of exemption orders. This is currently work in progress and you will be able to hear more about it in tomorrow's session entitled 'Teeth, feet and reproduction'.

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And with SPVS we have been exploring opportunities to work together on providing high-quality non-clinical CPD to build on BVA's ever-improving programme.

These are just a few examples, but in the bigger picture, each of our divisions has been a vital element in the success of BVA's new Council.

As many of you will know our March Council meeting was the culmination of a long process to review and restructure Council to ensure it was as effective as possible and, importantly, to provide every BVA member with a direct link into our main policy-making body.

An impressive 30% of BVA members embraced the new structure by voting for their own regional representative to provide that link.

We've now had three meetings under the new structure and we are very pleased with progress. Council meetings are dynamic with regional and divisional representatives bringing views from vets on the ground; the majority of which have been gathered through the BVA's new online community platform.

The community platform was an ambitious undertaking but we are now seeing members debating with one another, holding BVA to account, and raising new issues for us to investigate and champion.

If you are not yet logged onto the community, you're missing out. Visit the BVA stand over the next couple of days and we can help you get started.

The BVA also enjoys a good working relationship with the RCVS and this year progress has been made on a Legislative Reform Order to improve the disciplinary function of the College and ensure the ongoing public trust in the regulation of our profession.

In light of this progress the BVA is still firmly of the view that we do not need a new Veterinary Surgeons Act, and we will continue to work with the College to provide for the regulation of veterinary service providers.

The BVA seeks coalitions to achieve common aims. On the issue of wild animals in travelling circuses we joined forces with *The Independent* newspaper, the Born Free Foundation and others to make the strong case for a ban, carrying the weight of public opinion.

On the microchipping of dogs, the BVA became one of the founding members of the Microchipping Alliance, chaired by the Dogs Trust, and one of the leading voices calling for the compulsory microchipping of all dogs.

Also on dog welfare issues the BVA's Animal Welfare Foundation is making progress with the RSPCA to develop a puppy contract to help good breeders and puppy buyers promote healthy breeding, and we hope to launch the contract early next year.

The BVA and Kennel Club Canine Health Schemes has worked hard to develop the much-needed scheme to screen for syringomyelia – one of the diseases that became a focus for the *Pedigree Dogs Exposed* programme in 2008 – and I was delighted to announce earlier today that the scheme will begin in January 2012.

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We know that the production team behind *Pedigree Dogs Exposed* is planning another programme to provide an update on progress so at Council in July we debated whether the profession has done enough.

Initiatives such as the puppy contract, the syringomyelia scheme, the BVA's stance on reporting caesarean sections and registering litters born by caesarean, and our lobbying efforts to change legislation governing breeding establishments in Wales all paint a positive picture.

But are we doing enough? Reporting of conformation surgery to the Kennel Club is too low and I would encourage vets in small animal practice to step up their efforts to provide this data and help us get a better picture of the problems we face.

We'll hear a lot more on this issue at Saturday afternoon's session 'Dog breeding – where is it going?'

And we also need to think about where our profession is going. As I said in my opening, the profession is constantly evolving and the BVA's Members' Services Group plays an important role in ensuring we are providing the most useful resources to our members to suit their professional lives.

The mediation and representation services, put in place a year and a half ago following feedback from members, are proving very popular with members who need expert advice and support.

The issue of the veterinary union has moved forward this year but the BVA and our divisions are already well-equipped to meet the needs of members and I'm pleased to report that our membership levels have continued to grow.

The BVA is taking a lead for future generations of vets too.

I don't need to tell this audience that £50,000 tuition fee debt could seriously impact on our ability to attract young people into veterinary medicine, to promote less-well paid jobs in large animal practice, research and medicine and to widen access to the profession.

Tomorrow's debate will ask whether veterinary education is a price worth paying and I'm sure you will all have your own views on that subject.

Again, each country within the UK is responding to the issue differently and we are working with the Association of Veterinary Students and others to make the case for more financial support for veterinary undergraduates, who are in a unique position.

Our relationship with AVS goes from strength to strength and the BVA's commitment to students has been furthered by our participation in the professional skills weeks at Liverpool and the RVC.

The new-look *Veterinary Record*, launched in January, has also been a hit with students thanks to the excellent careers section. Not to mention the launch of the Vet Record Careers iPhone app, which will keep job hunters up to date with the latest jobs in their region or area of work whilst on the go.

The role of the BVA in promoting veterinary careers options is just one of the issues being debated at the Veterinary Development Council. The VDC was established in January following Professor Lowe's report on veterinary expertise in food animal production. Work is now well underway to

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consider the role of the vet leading a team of paraprofessionals, to identify the strengths and weaknesses of different business models, and to define exactly what the food industry wants from us.

Through the VDC we are working closely with industry and the Government and the VDC Chair, Professor Richard Bennett, will provide a more detailed update at tomorrow's session 'Meeting market demand'.

Our role at the forefront of public health has never been more important, but it has always been at the core of our profession.

When Claude Bourgelat established the first veterinary school in Lyon he had a vision of a science-based profession where the link between animal and human biology and pathology was first recognised.

Today we know it as 'One Health' and, in World Veterinary Year it is a concept well worth celebrating.

Thank you.

**Harvey Locke BVSc MRCVS
BVA President 2010/11**