

Thursday, 24<sup>th</sup> September 2009

## **CONTENTIOUS ISSUES**

### **to be discussed at BVA Congress between 24 – 26 September**

#### **Friday**

- [Questions of breeding](#)
- [Time out on extramural studies](#) (EMS)
- [What, exactly, is a vet?](#)
- [Horses – a species apart?](#)
- [Pets and politics](#)

#### **Saturday**

- [Finding the right structure for welfare and health](#)
- [Pick-and-mix on medicines](#)
- [Bovine TB: where do we go from here?](#)
- [Who will take the high road?](#) (speakers include the UK's and all of the devolved nation's chief veterinary officers)

For contact details please see the [notes for editors](#)

#### **Questions of breeding (Friday 9.30am)**

Recent months have seen significant upheaval in the pedigree dog world as the adverse consequences of selective breeding have come under scrutiny. Advances in genetics and the development of new tests present new opportunities for tackling inherited diseases in dogs. This session will provide an opportunity for vets and breeders to respond to the recent upheaval.

**Professor Steve Dean** - Chair of the Southern Border Terrier Club

Professor Dean will argue that in order to effect change and general improvement in the health and welfare of pure-bred dogs, something of a sea change is needed in the approach and the attitude of the veterinary profession as a whole.

Genetic mutation is a natural state which is amplified by some breeding policies. Pedigree dog breeders are aware of problems that beset their breeds and in many cases have led the way in trying to establish protocols and guidance to eliminate or limit their effects. Veterinary surgeons have offered help in some areas either collectively as a profession (eg official eye, hip and elbow health schemes) or individually as specialists (eg breed related schemes to contain cardiac disease or syringomyelia). The advance in genetic science and technology is rapidly increasing the numbers of genetic screening tests which are largely progressing without integration of the general practitioner and more progress is on the horizon.

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## **BVA NEWS RELEASE 24 SEPTEMBER 2009**

A long-term improvement of the health and welfare of dogs generally will only come about if three aspects are considered

- an agreement about which inherited conditions offer the biggest threat and the most chance of success
- how, where the opportunity exists, to influence those who are most likely to provide effective change
- the collection and generation of data to help define efficient protocols and programmes focussing on the key conditions

If done effectively these three aspects should assist the profession and dog breeders to base future attitudes, decisions and actions on good science.

The presentation will offer suggestions on how the veterinary profession can address the issue of canine inherited disease. However the key desire of those who breed registered pedigree dogs is a veterinary profession which offers help, scientific advice and clinical support. In short, vets are invited to constructively join in with others who have been seeking to address inherited conditions for several decades.

**Professor Mike Herrtage** - Professor of small animal medicine at the University of Cambridge

To understand more fully how the veterinary profession can and should help dog breeders, it is worthwhile looking at what is already available:

- The BVA/KC Canine Health Schemes: Prof Herrtage will consider whether the eye and hip schemes have made a difference and how they could be further improved. It is only really in the last 10 years that we have collected and analysed the data in a way that has allowed us to answer some of these types of question. Prof Herrtage will also explore what impact the elbow scheme has had on the prevalence of the most common cause of forelimb lameness in dogs. We can show that in some breeds, the percentage of clear dogs going through the scheme has increased. The introduction of the requirement for permanent identification next January will certainly help strengthen these schemes and silence many of the critics.
- Genetic testing: DNA testing has been held up as the 'Holy Grail' of genetic disease management. This can sometimes stifle progress into reducing a disease because inertia sets in while a DNA test is being sought. There are now some 30 genetic tests available in the UK and even more worldwide. However, the hopes of eradication of a disease trait are not always realised when these tests are introduced and the disease often becomes much more complicated than the simple genetics might first have suggested.
- Clinical research groups: There are a number of research groups working on clinical problems within certain breeds that probably have a genetic cause. Funding for this research is limited and it can sometimes encourage researchers to 'talk up' the condition they want to work on and, in so doing, to falsely raise the expectation of producing a test or a cure.

So where can improvements be made?

- Data collection: Data collection for disease prevalence is pitiful compared to that seen in human medicine. Despite computerised records there is no easy way of collating the information from a number of different practices. This information is essential to help

## **BVA NEWS RELEASE 24 SEPTEMBER 2009**

understand the size of a problem within a breed and the process of data collection needs to continue.

- Education: It is really essential that owners, breeders and veterinarians are kept informed about the latest health issues in their breed. They should be aware of the necessity to collect samples, a prerequisite for genetic research. Veterinarians will need ready access to current information to provide quality advice and guidance to owners and breeders.

### **Time out on extramural studies (Friday 11am)**

Extramural studies (EMS) have long been an integral part of veterinary undergraduate education in the UK. However, with increased numbers of students, consolidation in practice, the problem of student debt and new approaches to education, questions arise as to whether they can continue to deliver what is required. Can students continue to deliver what is required and is EMS value for money? This debate will consider whether the current EMS system is sustainable and will discuss the possible alternatives.

**Mr Ian Beamish** - recent graduate vet and former member of the BVA Members Services Group

Rather than "EMS is failing" Mr Beamish will talk about how it has actually done very well thus far. However it is now letting some students down and we have to ask ourselves: is it a sustainable model with changing economic circumstance, increasing student numbers and an increasing reliance on it as an almost unique source of practical experience?

**Dr Barry Johnson** - Chair of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons EMS Working Party

Dr Barry Johnson will outline the main proposals made by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) Working Party on EMS, which have recently been out for consultation. The review found no support for EMS to be dropped and found that EMS is viewed as the "jewel in the crown" of UK veterinary education.

However, the working party identified a number of areas for improvement and made a number of recommendations to improve the structure of EMS, enhance training in veterinary public health and improve the allocation of time and resources by universities. The proposals suggest that everyone must do more: students, universities, practices and other placement providers, and the RCVS.

### **Wooldridge Memorial Lecture: What, exactly, is a vet? (Friday 12.15pm)**

**Professor Sandy Trees** – President of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons

Things have moved on since the era described in the novels by James Herriot. The role of vets has changed considerably, and so has what the public expects of them. The profession has diversified as knowledge has increased and new specialties have emerged. On the face of it, there is much to separate, say, a farm animal practitioner in the North of Scotland from a small animal practitioner in central London or an equine practitioner in Newmarket, in terms of the skills required and the roles they perform.

In addition, vets fulfil many vital, often specialist, roles outside practice, whether in teaching and research, public health, government service, charities, industry or elsewhere. In the veterinary schools there are now fewer opportunities for vets to get to know each other as student numbers have increased and teaching methods have changed. However, for all the changes and diversification, the unique combination of skills that makes vets so useful to society continues to be

**BVA NEWS RELEASE  
24 SEPTEMBER 2009**

recognised and the profession still seems to regard itself as a cohesive whole — not just in the UK, but also internationally.

This lecture will seek to identify the defining characteristics of a vet, and what still binds the profession together.

**Horses – a species apart? (Friday 2.30pm)**

Horses mean different things to different people. Some see them as companions while others regard them as sport or working animals. There are also numerous feral horses in the UK, while European legislation classifies horses as food animals. This might not all seem to matter too much, but what does it mean for animal welfare and disease control, and who exactly is responsible? This session will consider horses in the context of the Animal Health and Welfare Strategy and try to establish where they fit in the scheme of things.

**Mr Gavin Ross** - Programme Manager, Responsibility and Cost Sharing Programme for Animal Health, Defra

Gavin Ross will look at horses in the context of the Animal Health and Welfare strategy and government plans for responsibility and cost sharing (RCS). Through Dr Tim Morris equine interests will be represented on the RCS Advisory Group and in early 2010 the Equine Exotic Disease Core Group will be established. Given the need for preparedness, surveillance, and contingency planning for all susceptible species, Mr Ross will explore the options for the treatment of equines within the future cost sharing structure Defra proposes.

**Mr Chris House** - President of the British Equine Veterinary Association - will also be speaking

**Pets and politics (Friday 4pm)**

Some of the measures applied under the Pet Travel Scheme to protect the UK from rabies and other zoonotic diseases could be swept away next year when a derogation under EU law, which allows the UK to apply stricter controls than most other member states, is due to expire.

Are the current controls actually necessary or is this a case of 'harmonisation gone mad'? This debate will address the issues, from both a European Commission and a public health perspective.

**Dr Dilys Morgan** – Health Protection Agency

Dr Morgan will be arguing to keep the derogation on the basis of the risk to human health from potentially fatal tickborne diseases.

**Dr Hélène Klein** – European Commission, Directorate General Health and Consumers (DG SANCO)

Dr Klein will be arguing for harmonising UK pet travel rules with EU regulations.

Regulation (EC) No 998/2003 of the European Parliament and of the Council ('The Regulation') harmonises the animal health requirements applicable to the non-commercial movement of pet animals.

The Regulation lays down a legal obligation to review the rules by the end of the transitional period on the basis of the experience gained so far and a risk evaluation. The Commission has identified and evaluated options for determining the regime to be applied as of 1 July 2010.

**BVA NEWS RELEASE  
24 SEPTEMBER 2009**

Given the spectacular improvement in the rabies situation in the EU in the last twenty years bringing the rabies risk across the EU to a very low level, the Commission considers that it is now time to move to modernised and harmonised pet movement rules that are proportionate to the risk and ease movements of people who travel with their pet animals.

The Commission has submitted in June 2009 a proposal to the European Parliament and to the Council which further prolongs the transitional regime until 31 December 2011 and introduces technical adaptations with regard to rabies vaccines and electronic identification and the possibility for the Commission to adopt preventive health measures in relation to diseases other than rabies under the Comitology procedure. The Commission proposal still needs to be agreed by the European Parliament and Council.

**Finding the right structure for welfare and health (Saturday 9.30am)**

Defra's plans on responsibility and cost sharing include a proposal to establish a new agency for animal health, which will operate 'at arm's length' from Government. Meanwhile, responsibility for animal welfare will remain within Defra.

Animal health and welfare are interdependent, as the Animal Health and Welfare Strategy seems to recognise. This session will ask whether animal health and welfare can really be administered separately, or whether they should they be regarded as an indivisible whole?

**Mr Gavin Ross** – Programme Manager, Responsibility and Cost Sharing Programme for Animal Health, Defra

Gavin Ross will set out the current thinking, aims and timetables for a new animal health body in the context of responsibility and cost sharing. Animal welfare will remain in Defra due to the high level of general public concerns and interest as well as the political nature of the issues (eg circuses, fur, animal testing, slaughter, tail docking). It is therefore appropriate that Ministers remain directly accountable to Parliament and the electorate on animal welfare. But that doesn't prevent essential connections between animal health and animal welfare being maintained under the new arrangements. Defra policy is already split in this way, but all areas are involved in the case of an outbreak.

Under the new structure Defra will retain primary responsibility for animal welfare. Under current plans the CVO would continue with a UK-wide remit based in Defra and retaining the same responsibilities as now, advising Ministers as well as the Chair/Board of the new body, covering animal welfare as well as animal disease. The new body will need, and want, to take account of welfare when tackling disease – routinely and in outbreak situations – and will be an important interlocutor as Defra designs welfare policy. The new body will also be a partner for Defra in disseminating information, with the aim of delivering pro-welfare behaviour change.

There are a number of possible risks and issues, including the need to ensure welfare is taken fully into account in decision-making and minimising the risk of issues falling between Defra and the new body, or of duplication or incoherence. However, there are also many mechanisms to avoid these risks and reap benefits, including the composition and expertise of the board, service level agreements, legislation, and communication policies.

**Mr Michael Seals** – Chairman of National Fallen Stock Company

Mr Seals will be speaking about the impact of responsibility and cost sharing and will show an example of a successful public/private partnership in the agricultural sector. He will focus on risk

**BVA NEWS RELEASE  
24 SEPTEMBER 2009**

management and cost control and on what is required to bring about better productivity at reduced costs to those involved in the task of managing animal disease risks.

The full speech is available on request.

**Mr Iain Richards** – President of the Society of Practising Veterinary Surgeons

Animal Health and Welfare has been a phrase that recurs throughout much of Defra's work over the last few years. It is only since March 2009 that a proposal has emerged to treat the two as separate. Mr Richards will argue that it is wrong to separate them. Defra seems to suggest that there are instances of animal welfare improvements that can be made without involving animal health. Mr Richards's presentation will look at the history of the Animal Health and Welfare Strategy and will use definitions of welfare and practical examples to arrive at the conclusion.

**Pick-and-mix on medicines (Saturday 11am)**

Achieving the right balance in the supply of animal medicines and vaccines is a delicate task. They have to be available for use when needed but must be used safely and appropriately, not least because of concerns about the development of resistance and because, as biologically active compounds, the possibility of unwanted effects on animal and human health as well as the environment. As one regulator once put it, 'We're not just dealing with sweets.'

At a time when existing medicines are being reassigned to different distribution categories, this session will explore whether current distribution channels are overly restrictive or whether they can be relaxed.

**Mr John Fitzgerald** - Operations Director, Veterinary Medicines Directorate

John Fitzgerald will explain why we regulate veterinary medicines – to protect animals and consumers – and how we endeavour to use proportionate controls to ensure the maximum availability of veterinary medicinal products that can be used safely and effectively.

Other issues include

- distribution categories: why we have them, the numbers of products recommended for a different category by the current review, a possible new category to allow initial diagnosis by a vet followed by supply by a vet, pharmacist or suitably qualified person (SQP)
- vets and SQPs working more closely together: a new initiative to make the best use of each group's skills with examples and pilot work by RUMA
- internet selling: identifying the problems and how VMD is thinking of addressing them
- prescription fraud: identifying the problems and how VMD is thinking of addressing them
- the 28 day rule for using an injectable product after the bottle has been broached: why this is in place and what can be done to address the difficulties it causes.

**Mr Peter Morris** – farmer and Chief Executive of the National Sheep Association

In achieving the good health and welfare of their animals, sheep farmers look to vets to: ensure that the health status of the flock and, where appropriate, individual animals is known and understood; take risk-based and management decisions that are associated with that knowledge; and implement the most cost-effective means of achieving the required health and welfare related outcome. But can they deliver all three parts of the process?

## **BVA NEWS RELEASE 24 SEPTEMBER 2009**

On regulation some sheep farmers say that sheep health and welfare improvements are being held back by over protective and outdated regulatory restrictions on some products and practices. There are many medicines and vaccines which should be under the control of vets only, as they currently are. But, in the eyes of many sheep farmers, there are examples where the current system simply gets it wrong.

Sheep farmers want to see a greater recognition of farmer skills by vets and regulators, and would welcome ways to develop the advisory role of vets in improving the overall well-being of the flock.

**Mr Neil Sargison** - Senior Lecturer, Large Animal Practice, Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies

Mr Sargison will argue strongly that the current medicines regulations are not robust enough, using specific examples to illustrate his points.

Effective medicines are needed for use on farm animals which can be demonstrated using the example of parasitic diseases in sheep. These diseases are seriously production-limiting and a threat to animal welfare.

However, anti-parasitics are not sustainable given the emergence of resistance, and the seriousness and complexities of how resistance emerges. There are also issues regarding environmental sustainability, including the impact on animal and human health.

The current medicines regulations are not restrictive enough and there is a case for anthelmintics to become POMV (Prescription Only Medicine - Veterinary Surgeon) rather than POMVPS (Prescription Only Medicine – Veterinary Surgeon, Pharmacist, Suitably Qualified Person). The emergence of resistance is such a complicated issue and the management strategies so complex they essentially become part of a veterinary flock health plan, which only vets are qualified to implement.

### **Bovine TB: where do we go from here? (Saturday 2.30pm)**

In England, the recently formed Bovine TB Eradication Group has been asked to come up with a plan for eradicating TB, while over the border in Wales, the Welsh administration is actively pursuing one. In the meantime, research aimed at finding a vaccine continues.

This session will assess how things stand on TB and, taking a long term view, whether eradication is feasible and what might realistically be achieved.

Speakers include Mr Richard (Dez) Delahay, a wildlife biologist for the Food and Environment Research Agency and Mr Andrew Biggs, Past-President of the British Cattle Veterinary Association and vet in mixed practice in Devon.

### **Who will take the high road? (Saturday 4pm)**

Animal health and welfare policy is devolved in the UK and, as different approaches to bovine TB, bluetongue and the docking of dogs' tails have demonstrated, the devolved administrations are increasingly going their own separate ways. What are the advantages and disadvantages in terms of safeguarding animal health, and are the administrative, operational and budgetary structures currently in place appropriate?

This debate will take the form of a panel discussion, involving the Chief Veterinary Officer (CVO) for Defra and the UK, and the CVOs in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

**Mr Nigel Gibbens** – CVO for Defra and the UK

Following devolution, policy decisions on animal health and welfare are taken by the separate administrations in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. However, this change of responsibility came against a background of established legislation. Much of this is set at EU level and the UK, and each administration within it, must meet those legal requirements. So we work against a framework of well understood shared objectives and principles for animal health and welfare.

Mr Gibbens will be talking about how this framework was further set out in the Great Britain Animal Health and Welfare Strategy, which included the four reasons for Government intervention – protecting public health, protecting animal welfare, enabling international trade, and protecting the interests of wider society. The latter encompasses a diverse range of interests, including protecting the environment, supporting the competitiveness of the livestock and related industries and minimising the impact of animal disease on the wider economy.

Whilst we are united by common high level objectives on animal health and welfare, the scope of potential activities by Governments, and the need to make hard choices and difficult policy decisions, not least about the use of limited resources, means that different policies will be justifiably pursued. But these differences must be well founded on an understanding of their impact on the UK as a whole and careful analysis of the costs and benefits to ensure that they do achieve the intended benefits. It is crucial that we do not erode our ability to deliver the essentials on a UK basis, such as effective surveillance and our ability to respond effectively to incursions of exotic diseases or new challenges, and that we maintain the UK's international reputation and ability to trade in animals and animal products. So we must always consider the impacts of animal health and welfare policies on the UK as a whole.

To achieve the benefits of devolution through policies that respond to the particular situation – both practical and political – of each administration whilst maintaining our shared objectives at the UK level we need to work closely together. Fundamental to this is ensuring that we have a common understanding of the veterinary basis for action, enabling other factors, such as economic analysis, then to be considered in reaching a final decision. We do work closely together and our systems to do this effectively continue to develop.

Animal Health and Welfare has been devolved for several years and, although in most areas a common approach remains the best for all parts of GB or the UK, we have seen different policies develop in some areas. The possibility of devolved budgets should not make any major difference to animal health and welfare but would enable policies to be developed and prioritised in the knowledge of defined budgets in each part of the UK. The practicalities of devolving budgets are under discussion. In planning for the possible devolution of budgets we must not only seek a sensible and fair apportionment of resources but also ensure that the outcome does not impact negatively on our ability to deliver effective surveillance and to respond effectively to incursions of exotic diseases or new animal health threats on a UK basis.

**Mr Simon Hall** – CVO for Scotland

The purpose of the Scottish Government is to focus government and public services on creating a more successful country with opportunities for all of Scotland to flourish through sustainable economic growth. Mr Hall will discuss how this has led to a positive attitude to the benefits of animal health, including sustaining Scotland's capacity to produce food and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

## **BVA NEWS RELEASE 24 SEPTEMBER 2009**

There is shared sense of purpose between the Scottish Government and livestock industries. A recent example of progress towards high health for Scotland is the successful application for Officially Tuberculosis Free (OTF) status. Another recent success has been compulsory vaccination for bluetongue virus (BTV8) where the veterinary profession, government and industry worked together to agree a policy, which everyone then took responsibility for implementing. For the future, we intend to make concerted efforts to deal with other diseases such as sheep scab and bovine viral diarrhoea.

### **Dr Christianne Glossop – CVO for Wales**

Animal health and welfare powers were devolved in full to Wales in January 2005 (following the Government of Wales Act 1998 and FMD in 2001). This provides scope for Wales to develop its own policies with regards to animal health and welfare mindful of:

- Common border with England (500+ farms)
- Single epidemiological unit with rest of GB
- Trade with rest of GB
- UK as the Member State
- European legislation
- GB Animal Health and Welfare Strategy

Co-operation with the rest of the UK is therefore essential. It is achieved through:

- Peacetime policy development – meetings at all levels within respective administrations including monthly CVO/DA meetings, Experts Group, ADPG, KIT meetings, UK TB Liaison Group etc.
- Contingency planning discussions and exercises.
- Common GB Contingency Plan complemented by the Welsh plan.
- Emergencies – CVO telecon, amber telecon, bird table, ADPG etc.

**BUT:** we reserve our right to adopt different policies where appropriate to meet the specific needs of Wales. For example:

- FMD 2007 – no disease in Wales but significant involvement in unfolding story in England, and huge workload re. emergency legislation, movement licensing, engaging with Welsh farming industry etc.
- Bluetongue 2007-2009 – initial emergence of infection, vaccination decisions, vaccine roll-out, surveillance.
- TB eradication programme in Wales – same problem but different approach to England.
- Priorities re. welfare post-Animal Welfare Act (England and Wales 2006) - Companion Animal Welfare Enhancement Scheme.
- Own minor emergencies – anthrax (2006), low path AI (Corwen) (2007).

Top priorities:

- Preparedness for exotic disease emergency
- TB eradication
- Ensuring appropriate delivery mechanism for animal health and welfare policy (relationship with Animal Health and OVs).

### **Mr Bert Houston – CVO for Northern Ireland**

Within the UK, Northern Ireland has always been in many ways a place apart, connected to Great Britain but at the same time very different and separate. Perhaps fortunately, some of those

**BVA NEWS RELEASE**  
**24 SEPTEMBER 2009**

different regional structures, in financing and service delivery, support devolution of policy in animal health and welfare.

Mr Houston will talk about the differing animal health status from that of the rest of GB. While still in the process of eradicating some diseases such as bovine brucellosis and Aujeszky's disease in pigs, the region is free from other diseases such as bluetongue. There is clearly sense in being able to accord priorities in animal health and welfare at regional level in this circumstance.

The delivery landscape for animal health and welfare policies in Northern Ireland is relatively simple, holistic and more centralised than in the rest of the UK. This has the benefit of a very clear line of responsibility through a local Minister for the delivery of local policies. However it is also more sensitive to the pressures on Government, especially finances.

Overall devolution of animal health and welfare policy has benefited Northern Ireland. We have been able to mitigate some of the effects of foot-and-mouth disease and bluetongue in the rest of the UK on trade from Northern Ireland and to set our own agenda for the eradication of diseases of importance to us. However, the downside is that while regional policy is devolved, UK policy in an international context is not and this can pose difficulties and cause frustration for devolved administrations.

Devolution is still new and has changed the dynamics of our relationships. We are still working to establish the benefits and reduce the risks of this change. We should be careful of introducing further changes until we understand and are comfortable with these new relationships.

**NOTES FOR EDITORS**

1. High and low resolution images of the speakers are available on request.
2. For further information, please contact the BVA Press Office on 020 7908 6340 or [media@bva.co.uk](mailto:media@bva.co.uk)