

BVA Position on veterinary scanning surveillance (animal health and disease monitoring) – Executive summary

Executive summary

BVA attributes equal importance to veterinary scanning surveillance and animal health and disease monitoring across production animals (including fish), equine, wildlife and companion animals. All forms of veterinary scanning surveillance (including diseases, infections, health syndromes¹ and antimicrobial resistance) act as a sentinel for wider human and animal health and are underpinned by a common 'One Health' rationale to minimise harm.² To this end, the continuous monitoring of new and emerging disease through data collection, analysis and sharing across species provides high-quality intelligence on animal health and welfare that enables policy makers, veterinary professionals and animal keepers to take decisions to improve animal health and welfare, productivity, and identify and manage threats to public health, trade, food quality, the environment and leisure and tourism.³

The value of animal health and disease monitoring and the role of the veterinary profession

The role of veterinary surgeons in protecting animal health, welfare and public health underpins all trade, as well as providing assurances for domestic consumers. Official statistics put the value of UK livestock outputs at £12.7 billion⁴ and the value of UK aquaculture outputs at £0.59 billion.⁵ The input of a thriving, sustainable veterinary workforce and a robust surveillance system is integral to the realisation of these high value outputs.

Veterinary surgeons working within the production animal sector work closely with farmers and animal keepers to ensure biosecurity measures are formulated, implemented and health and disease threats are monitored and acted upon. Both private veterinary surgeons and Government employed veterinary surgeons, are uniquely positioned to make every on-farm contact count by providing a holistic approach to overall herd health and welfare, its wider determinants and, in turn, disease surveillance and prevention.

The role of the veterinary profession: 'eyes and ears' of animal health and welfare across a myriad of settings

1 EPIC, 2017. 'Year 2030: What is the future of animal surveillance in Scotland?' [pdf] Available at: http://www.epicotland.org/media/1434/epic_scenario_planning_reportcompressed.pdf [Accessed: 2 January 2018].

2 OIE, 2017. 'The OIE recommends strengthening animal disease surveillance worldwide' [online] Available at: <http://www.oie.int/for-the-media/press-releases/detail/article/the-oie-recommends-strengthening-animal-diseasesurveillance-worldwide/> [Accessed: 8 January 2018].

3 Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories Agency (AHVLA), 2013. Surveillance 2014 Changes to the delivery of Veterinary Scanning Surveillance in England and Wales. Available at: <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20140707142907/http://www.defra.gov.uk/ahvlaen/disease-control/surveillance/new-vet-surv-model/> [Accessed: 2 January 2018].

4 Defra, DAERA, Welsh Government, Scottish Government, Agriculture in the United Kingdom 2016, 2017

5 Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science, 2012. Aquaculture statistics for the UK, with a focus on England and Wales. Available at:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/405469/Aquaculture_Statistics_UK_2012.pdf

The profession's vigilance, innovation and commitment to the role of the veterinary surgeon as a public guardian across species areas ensures the continual monitoring for endemic disease and oversight of new and emerging threats. Every day veterinary surgeons across different areas of practice and research routinely participate in different surveillance related activities to contribute to the surveillance network and safeguard the UK's animals, humans and trade opportunities.

Enhancing the UK surveillance systems

Whilst BVA recognises the recent financial constraints and remodelling that the UK Government surveillance networks have been faced with, fundamentally BVA would oppose any further reduction in the current level of Government resource spent on the scanning surveillance network in England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Instead, there are real opportunities for the veterinary profession to work with the UK Governments and other key stakeholders to modernise and optimise the existing surveillance network.

This can be achieved through:

- Maintaining the current level of Government resource spent on the scanning surveillance network Adopting new approaches to data collection and feedback.
- Optimising appropriate skills and expertise.
- Rethinking traditional approaches to funding and coordination.
- Articulating the value of surveillance reporting to the veterinary profession and other stakeholders through education to increase awareness and participation.
- Working collaboratively with stakeholders to explore innovative communication strategies.

Our specific recommendations are:

Maintaining the current level of Government resource for scanning surveillance

Network

Recommendation 1: As the UK looks to leave the EU, the UK Governments should maintain existing animal health legislation, maintain the current level of resources for veterinary surveillance and provide adequately resourced systems for detecting new and emerging disease to ensure there is no reduction of existing animal health standards and protections and to enable trade in animals and animal products.

Recommendation 2: In Northern Ireland, DAERA and the Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine should ensure that the present high level of cooperation continues across the border to raise animal health and welfare standards with an all-island approach when the UK leaves the EU.

Recommendation 3: As the UK looks to leave the EU and considers new approaches to data, reciprocal data sharing within the whole of Europe and elsewhere internationally should be maintained.

Recommendation 4: UK Governments should look to better harness and coordinate the differing strands of veterinary surveillance activity through a UK-wide strategy that aims to

ensure coverage is sufficient and representative of all contributors and addresses production animal, equine, companion animal and wildlife health and disease monitoring.

Recommendation 5: The UK Governments should establish a body to oversee and coordinate surveillance policy across the four administrations of the UK.

Recommendation 6: Government resources for the existing Veterinary Investigation Centres in the UK should be maintained, with no further reduction of key structures and reporting routes in the scanning surveillance network across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland without the provision of viable alternatives to maintain coverage.

Recommendation 7: There should be greater cooperation and collaboration between APHA, AFBI and SACCVS in the provision of diagnostic tests and tests required for trade to ensure a robust and reliable cost-effective service for veterinary surgeons and their clients to encourage contributions to the surveillance system while ensuring best value for the taxpayer.

Adopting new approaches to data collection and feedback

Recommendation 8: BVA calls on the UK Governments to increase the coverage of the scanning surveillance network through the use of syndromic surveillance and the repurposing of existing health data or data on clinical disease events eg. health records from private practice, private laboratories, abattoir reports, market monitoring, farm assurance schemes or fallen stock reports.

Recommendation 9: Submission and sharing of data should be incentivised by enabling veterinary professionals, veterinary practices, animal keepers and laboratories to derive professional, economic, logistic and public relations value from inputting data, on top of the value derived for animal health and welfare.

Recommendation 10: A respected, independent body should be identified as the trusted 'honest-broker' of data and information.

Optimising relevant skills and expertise

Recommendation 11: There should be no further reductions in the number of Veterinary Investigation Officers in England and Wales. Rather, across the UK the role and status of Veterinary Investigation Officers should be reinforced and engagement with local veterinary practices and communities increased in order to incentivise the role of Veterinary Investigation Officer or regional equivalent as a career option.

Recommendation 12: There should be a diversified career pathway for Veterinary Investigation Officers, as well as regional and partner provider equivalent roles, with

improved remuneration brought in line with rises in inflation and veterinary roles demanding equivalent skills and experience across the UK.

Recommendation 13: The UK Governments should explore opportunities for improved data sharing and capture from multiple sources, effectively harnessing relevant expertise in data analysis, assimilation and feedback to deliver meaningful analyses and outputs to stakeholders. As part of this, opportunities to strengthen the existing APHA Surveillance Epidemiology and Data Analysis (SEDA) team within the Surveillance Intelligence Unit (SIU) should also be explored and resourced.

Recommendation 14: The UK Governments should make greater use of communications experts to optimise existing communications channels, better utilise digital platforms and ensure effective and timely communications about reporting routes, what data to report, diagnostic support and alerts when action or heightened awareness is needed.

Rethinking traditional approaches to funding and coordination

Recommendation 15: Consideration should be given to taking a blended funding approach to surveillance, research and delivery with the UK Governments working in partnerships to co-fund projects with research institutions (eg. Research Councils UK), industry organisations or charities.

Recommendation 16: As the Animal Health Surveillance Governance Board for England and Wales reaches the end of its three-year term, its effectiveness should be robustly reviewed to ensure an appropriate governance structure is maintained.

Recommendation 17: Existing Government and Government-partner initiative scanning surveillance infrastructure and surveillance reporting routes across the UK nations should be expanded to provide defined reporting routes for small animal surveillance and more coordinated ways to report wildlife and equine disease surveillance to ensure joined-up working across species groups and organisations carrying out surveillance activities.

Recommendation 18: As the UK Governments consider legislation surrounding wildlife rehabilitation centres, regard should be given to disease investigation, surveillance procedures and reporting routes for disease incidents recognised at wildlife rehabilitation centres.

Articulating the value of surveillance through education

Recommendation 19: RCVS Day One Competences should be further developed to include specific reference to practical skills in surveillance activities (contributing to and using surveillance reports), which are consolidated by veterinary graduates throughout their Professional Development Phase.

Recommendation 20: Vet schools should review their curricula to ensure they reflect the clinical, business and professional value of surveillance and adopt approaches to incentivise participation in surveillance activities across species areas.

Working collaboratively with stakeholders to explore innovative communication strategies

Recommendation 21: The UK Governments should consider the development of a centralised web platform that clearly outlines the details of how to contribute to surveillance activities across species areas, including small animal, equine and wildlife disease surveillance, as well as where to access supporting resources

Recommendation 22: The UK Governments should further adapt their surveillance outputs and communications in order to optimise engagement through online and hand-held media, for example via Twitter, Facebook groups, apps, finger tips data and extending the recently launched APHA Disease Surveillance Dashboards across the UK.

Recommendation 23: In order to increase engagement with surveillance activities, consideration should be given to applying behavioural insight frameworks to adapt current communications outputs and language in order to positively influence behaviours and incentivise engagement.

Recommendation 24: The value of the service provided by Veterinary Investigation Centres, APHA partner post-mortem providers, SAC Disease Investigation Centres and AFBI laboratories should be better defined and communicated to both private veterinary surgeons and farmers to increase participation in surveillance activities and dialogue with local Veterinary Investigation Officers to improve overall animal health management.

Recommendation 25: BVA has a role to play in raising awareness of surveillance activities and contributions, the reporting routes available and the value of disease surveillance and health and disease monitoring amongst the veterinary profession. We would welcome opportunities to work in partnership with key stakeholders to explore innovative communication strategies with the aim of increasing participation and awareness of reporting routes across different species areas.

Last updated August 2018.