

BVA policy position on the responsible use of antimicrobials in food producing animals

Executive summary

BVA recognises antimicrobial resistance (AMR) as an issue of critical importance to society as a whole and is committed to providing leadership on this issue. Antimicrobials are essential to both veterinary and human medicine to treat infectious diseases. Continued availability of all existing antimicrobial classes and the development of new ones for veterinary use are essential to maintain the health and welfare of animals and the protection of public health.

A reduction in the use of antimicrobials in animals under the care of veterinary surgeons can only be achieved through improvements to animal health and welfare via disease prevention strategies, including improved animal husbandry and management.

Our overall aim is responsible prescribing and responsible use across the profession, industry, and in the wider context of One Health, recognising synergies between animal health, public health and environmental specialists. To fulfil this aim, BVA makes the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1: Prescribing veterinary surgeons should always carefully consider the use of an antimicrobial, with special attention given to the risk of resistance to these products as part of the benefit/risk assessment.

Recommendation 2: Use of Highest Priority Critically Important Antibiotics (HP CIAs), as defined by the European Medicines Agency, must be restricted for use used as a last resort under veterinary direction, backed up by either sensitivity or diagnostic testing. Where the welfare of the individual animal, herd or flock, and wider context are considered, euthanasia is an alternative treatment option. Off label use must be reserved for exceptional circumstances, following appropriate sensitivity testing.

Recommendation 3: In the interests of animal welfare, critically important antibiotics should remain available for veterinary use. They provide key treatments against some animal diseases where there are currently few or no viable alternatives.

Recommendation 4: Detailed preventive medicine programmes should be documented and regularly reviewed for all farms and/or holdings.

Recommendation 5: Government should promote incentives to improving husbandry and biosecurity measures on farm, within a system of Government agricultural support. The involvement of veterinary surgeons will be essential to any such scheme.

Recommendation 6: Government and the private sector should prioritise the development of effective diagnostic tools. The development of rapid diagnostic tests that can be used on farm and in clinics should be explored as an outcome.

Recommendation 7: Each veterinary practice should develop a written policy or protocol covering the circumstances in which metaphylaxis is considered appropriate. Where antimicrobials are used for metaphylaxis that the clinical justification should be recorded on each occasion.

Recommendation 8: Any off-label use of antimicrobials should be carefully justified. Where the clinical judgement of the veterinary surgeon is satisfied, the veterinary surgeon should prescribe an antibiotic under the cascade in the interests of minimising the development of resistance.

Recommendation 9: Farm assurance schemes should incorporate responsible use of antimicrobials as a requirement of the scheme.

Recommendation 10: Veterinary surgeons should familiarise themselves with the targets for their sector and work with producers to achieve these targets.

Recommendation 11: Government should continue to work with vets and industry to review and set further rational targets through the RUMA Targets Task Force. This should recognise and build on the success to date of BVA specialist divisions, industry and Government in reducing antimicrobial usage.

Recommendation 12: Improved data capture, analysis, dissemination and benchmarking are required across all sectors to underpin future interventions. Efforts to provide usage data rather than sales data, should be incorporated within the new UK Government AMR strategy.

Recommendation 13: A greater focus on improving surveillance and the flow of information and communication between farmers, vets, labs and national bodies so that all parties can get a better understanding of disease incidence, medicines use and vaccine use, which will improve decision making to tackle AMR.

Recommendation 14: Farmers and stock keepers play a major role in ensuring the responsible use of medicines on farms. They should be empowered through education, facilitation and incentivised to work with their vets to achieve this.

Recommendation 15: Progress the One Health approach by bringing together stakeholders across human, animal and environmental health, recognising this is a shared problem that must be addressed together and not subject to a culture of blame.