

Food for thought at BCVA

WITH two main sessions and two workshops available simultaneously throughout the three days of the BCVA congress, it was necessary for delegates to pick their way through the programme and select the topics of direct interest.

Some of the fringe presentations gave cause for thought and on the second day it was a recent graduate session, chaired by Paddy Gordon, that made delegates appreciate just how much effort and support is available to new graduates, with the emphasis on cattle practice.

Fred McKeating, technical director of the Veterinary Defence Society, outlined some of the important issues with Bill Mavirm the VDS chairman, offering further information and personal observations. The opening advice was to read the RCVS *Guide to Professional Conduct* and to be aware of the standards demanded in practice.

It was clearly stated that "a vet's stature is never diminished by asking for a second opinion"; in fact it is often the situation that clients like to think that their particular clinical issue is a special case. It is also particularly appropriate when carrying out surgery in the field to warn the client of a possible poor outcome.

Defective or misleading certification is a common element of VDS work and the advice to new graduates is to sign with caution, clarity and certainty. Of the 531 2009 graduates, 37 had a claim against them in 2010 but none ended up in court. Issues involving prostaglandin was a typical cattle example. Carl Padgett, the BVA president, pointed out that under insurance is an issue with modern farm work.

All members of the BVA can obtain free legal advice on anything, he said, and there is a mediation advice available for disagreements with employers, including legal representation.

Although this session was competing with major technical papers, the recent graduates who attended took the opportunity to increase their confidence levels in their practice activity and older graduates might also have benefited from this relaxed and informative workshop.

BVD programmes

The BVD papers and discussion session proved lively. Jonathan Statham of the Bishopton Veterinary Group described development with the Nidderdale BVD pilot scheme involving 10 dairy and 10 beef herds. Poor BVDV control was identified as

one of the problems with 13 of the herds having PIs (persistently infected) or evidence of exposure. There was evidence of consequential pneumonia in calves and variable fertility from poor to good.

The practice is now engaging with a group of farmers who had not been seen within herd health initiatives. Compliance with vaccination requirements is poor and the practice is helping to vaccinate animals utilising

RICHARD GARD
concludes his reports on the 2011 congress of the British Cattle Veterinary Association

lay staff. There is enthusiasm at vet and farmer level to manage the practical aspects of BVD control and the benefits, successes and any failures are being collated.

Richard Booth of the RVC presented the preliminary results and experiences from a pilot eradication scheme in Somerset; 30 herds – 30 dairy (averaging 344 cows) and four beef (averaging 98 cattle) – have remained in the programme: initially 14 were BVDV free and currently 29 herds are BVDV free.

Important lessons learned include the need to recognise that vaccination protects the foetus by protecting the dam and that there has to be proper application of the full BVD control programme. Of the 16 herds that had PIs, nine were already vaccinating and five had started vaccinating, but they still had PIs. Fifteen farms have culled 61 PIs and these animals have not been put onto the open market.

There has been a general improvement in fertility and a drop in drug use for pneumonia and scour. Full analysis of the scheme is being carried out and will be published.

Having gathered information from various BVD eradication schemes, Scotland is to have a national programme, promoted and outlined by Nigel Miller, president of NFU Scotland. During 2010-11 4,900 herds were offered voluntary screening. Compulsory screening started in December and from December 2012 it will be illegal to sell a PI beast except direct to slaughter. Infected herds will have movement controls.

Each herd will have a recognised BVD status: very low risk, low risk and undeclared or not negative. Of 3,063 beef herds surveyed, 77% were BVDV negative and of 487 dairy herds, 52% negative. One option being discussed is to offer eradication now to recognised BVD-free areas so that farmers are able to have the benefits of low-risk trading, or aim for

countrywide eradication later.

Mr Miller said the industry and vets had to get behind the Scotland BVD eradication scheme or it would fail.

Working for the state

Simon Hall, veterinary director of the AHVLA, discussed the role of the farm vet in delivering state veterinary medicine. Certain functions would remain with the Government, he said, including in-depth investigations, exotic disease outbreak management, specialist skills, unresolved conflict of interest and enforcement.

As the AHVLA workforce shrinks, practices could offer not only a 24-hour response to disease but also export certification, specialist support, more surveillance, regulatory inspections, statutory endemic diseases and exotic disease response. With an increasing role, veterinary practices would receive payments and would be required to engage with clinical governance, quality assurance, CPD and training.

The current procurement proposals for bTB testing were highlighted and these and other developments will engage veterinary practices and their organisations for the foreseeable future.

Sustainable food production and the future for cattle makes the vet the key to efficient production, said Nigel Gibbens, CVO at DEFRA, who highlighted some of the disease challenges, such as the constant low risk of foot-and-mouth disease being "parachuted" into the UK, and the need for on-going surveillance with bluetongue although the UK is currently free of the disease. In addition, climate change is expected to lead to an increased risk from vector-borne diseases like Rift Valley Fever.

Change is coming, he said, adding: "We don't know when and how fast but a holistic approach to livestock production will be required in the future." Good systems of production should not be dependent on microbiologicals and emphasis should be placed on the responsible use of antimicrobials and anthelmintics.

MRSA swabbing

Throughout the congress Dr Mark Holmes of the University of Cambridge swabbed delegates for MRSA (methicillin resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*). Strains of MRSA have been identified in man and dairy cattle with mastitis but there is



The BCVA officers: Andrew Prail (president), John Fishwick (senior vice-president) and Jonathan Statham (junior vice-president).

insufficient evidence to be certain that transmission of the new mecA MRSA homologue from dairy cows to people is occurring, he said.

There is concern that people working with cattle could become asymptomatic carriers and the infection could pass to the wider population. In general there has been a substantial drop in hospital cases of MRSA by clinicians washing their hands. The paper "MRSA found in dairy cows and people in Europe" is in *Cattle Practice*.

The workshop on internet marketing by Susie Samuel (vethelpdirect.com) revealed rather wide variations in the understanding and use of social media among the delegates.

This is very much a developing topic and with Facebook having 11.9 million "hits" a day, they were advised to have a business page within Facebook. With Twitter and tweets for people to follow and Google alerts, there are many tools to assist veterinary surgeons.

Lasting impression

The congress was not all about serious cattle matters. A drinks reception, prior to the president's dinner was sponsored by Vetoquinol, with the dinner entertainment arranged by MSD Animal Health. The lady violinists left a lasting impression.

Over 50 exhibition stands supported the congress with many promotions and discussions. A cunning treasure hunt, involving 28 of the stands, was sponsored by Forum Animal Health and the prize was won by Gina Togneri from the Penmellyn Veterinary Group.

Phil Kenward, of Farmvets Southwest, simply had to enter his details at the registration desk to win the illustrated musings of the English Longhorn, presented by Trevor Jones in aid of the Veterinary Benevolent Fund.

At the AGM Andrew Prail was installed as president for 2011-12, with John Fishwick as senior vice-president and Jonathan Statham the junior vice-president.

■ The 2012 BCVA congress will run from 15th to 17th November in Telford, Shropshire.