ARE NURSES GETTING A FAIR DEAL?

VETERINARY surgeons will often say that their nurses make a valuable contribution to the success of the practice, but are they prepared to put their money where their mouth is and offer these staff a decent wage?

That question must have crossed the minds of many of those who attended the session held by the Royal College during the BSAVA congress to highlight the initial results of its 2008 survey of veterinary nurses.

A questionnaire was completed by 3,671 listed, registered and student VNs and gives an insight into their training, working conditions and attitudes towards the future development of their profession.

The overall message of the survey will come as no surprise to the nurses themselves or their employers in showing that qualified VNs are still extremely poorly paid.

About 40% earn an annual salary of between £15,000 and £20,000 with under 20% earning above the national median for women in the UK workforce of £21,700.

About 10% have earnings below the national minimum wage of £10,664 for a 37.5 hour week.

However, the preliminary analysis lumps together part- and full-time staff and so it is unclear if these lowest paid staff are only working a few hours per week or whether their employers are flouting the law.

Certainly, 13% of respondents have some form of second income, which Mrs Andrea Jeffery, who chairs the RCVS Veterinary Nurses Council, interpreted as an indication that many were struggling to survive on their main salary. There are other indicators in the survey that the terms and conditions for VNs are not the most generous: 14% have to pay for their own CPD, 15% receive no overtime payments and 23% receive nothing for time spent on call.

Nevertheless, a large majority of respondents are happy in their work: 75% say they plan to stay in their current job for the foreseeable future, and, if they had their time again, 55% would choose to train as a VN, a similar level of satisfaction to that in a comparable survey of veterinarians.

The study also threw up a number of positive findings: generally VNs are being given opportunities in practice to develop areas of special expertise and most are able to devote more than the basic minimum time each year to CPD.

A majority appear to find their work satisfying, although better pay and being shown more respect by their employers would make their enjoyment even greater.

Marbocyl® 10% allows rapid return to normal milk production

Marbocyl® 10% has been shown to achieve high bacteriological cure rates in acute mastitis.

Marbocyl® 10% has a short milk withdrawal

A case of acute E. coli mastitis can lead to losses in milk production and milk discard of over 600 litres.

With the milk price at 28p a litre*, milk loss alone is significant.

Marbocyl® Paving the road to fitness

Further information is available on request from: Vetoquinol UK Limited, Vetoquinol House, Great Slade, Buckingham Industrial Park, Buckingham, MK18 1PA.

TEL: 01280 814500 FAX: 01280 825460

Website: www.vetoquinol.co.uk
The RVCS Trust has awarded over £1,000,000 to nearly 60 research and animal welfare projects in the UK and overseas to mark its golden jubilee year. In addition to a £250,000 investment in six new UK residencies and nearly £320,000 across nine new Blue Sky Research Projects, the Trust has released an additional £500,000 to fund two golden jubilee awards: one at the Royal (Dick) looking at canine ageing and regeneration and another at the Liverpool veterinary school in veterinary pathogen genomics.

The Trust is also funding a number of overseas projects through its network of charity partners, including SPANA, Wildlife Vets International and the Worldwide Veterinary Service.

Welfare initiatives the Trust is supporting include an evaluation of young graduate well-being, the development of support schemes for recent graduates and the Lancaster Final Year Seminar.

**Poisons information**

THE BVA Animal Welfare Foundation, in conjunction with the Veterinary Poisons Information Service (VPIS), has published an update of the Pets and Poisons – Keeping Your Animals Safe leaflet, first produced in 2004. It provides a reference guide for owners on preventing poisoning along with what to do if you think an animal has been poisoned. Practices can obtain batches of 50 leaflets for the waiting room free (although a donation to AWF is encouraged) directly from the BVA agent, Ten Alps, telephone 0207 782207, or download copies from www.vetswaste.org.uk/resources/leaflets/pets_poisons_leaflet_2008_FINAL1.pdf.

**It shouldn’t happen!**

THE National Office of Animal Health is looking for “it shouldn’t happen to a pet” anecdotes to highlight the lack of awareness of pet health issues amongst owners. With a prize of £500 towards a staff Christmas party for the winning anecdote, NOAH will use the stories in a campaign to raise awareness of common pet care misconceptions and to highlight the importance of animal health and welfare considerations.

“Funny” pet-related anecdotes can be submitted on entry forms on www.noah.co.uk. Closing date is Friday 30th May.

**Roslin joins Dick**

THE Roslin Institute is joining forces with the Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies in Edinburgh. The veterinary school is contributing 18 group leaders and their research teams. Further recruitment over the next few years is expected to see The Roslin Institute double its staff numbers to about 500. As part of its expansion, the institute will move to a £58.5 million building next to the new veterinary school development at Easter Bush, Midlothian, which is planned for completion in 2010. The Roslin Institute is to benefit from £40 million of research funding from the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council over the next five years.

Professor David Hume, director of the institute, said the pooling of resources and expertise would further cement the position of Scotland as the world’s leading centre of animal sciences research.

**‘One world’ seminar**

ONE World, One Disease is the title of a seminar to be held at the Royal Society of Medicine in London on 24th June. Jointly organised by the RSM and the RVCS, it will examine some of the effects of climate change on patterns of animal health and the impact of this on humans.

The meeting, says the College, will provide an understanding of the complexity of the global changes faced, and work towards the integrated approach needed to manage the serious problems that threaten animal and human health.

Speakers will include Professor Sheila Crispin, RVCS senior vice-president, who has been instrumental in organising the conference; Caroline Lucas, MEP; Professor Bob Watson, DEFRA’s chief scientific adviser; Professor Quintin McKellar of the RCVS; and Dr Col Tim Brooke’s from the Health Protection Agency.

Tickets are available via the RSM website, www.rsm.ac.uk/academ/e10-one-world.php.

**Worming campaign**

NOVARTIS Animal Health is launching an initiative designed to raise pet owner awareness about the importance of worming. The Worm Patrol is a campaign which can be easily implemented in practice, the firm says, and is supported by a comprehensive range of marketing materials.

The company is also introducing this month a four-tablet pack of Milbemax in both the Dog and Cat Tasty tablets for use alongside the campaign “to provide a complete and convenient service for clients.”

Practices can choose when they wish to run their Worm Patrol campaign and interested practices should contact a Novartis territory manager or call the practice support line on 0808 854100 to find out how.

Marketing materials include a waiting room display kit, client information leaflets, badges, stickers and a PR toolkit. A focal point in the waiting room will be a Worm Patrol stand.

**Microchip month**

JUNE is National Microchip Month. VBac reports that it is giving full support to the month with special offers on BackHome microchips throughout May and June for practices offering Microchip events.

These chips can be read by all scanners conforming to the ISO standard, being a pan-European brand present in eight European countries. The chips are pre-loaded in disposable implanters.

They come with registration documents for postal or internet registration on the AniBase database, collar tags to show the animal is chipped and receipt confirmation reply-cards to enable back-tracking of chips to practice.

---

**Funding for senior lecturership** – Vets Now is funding the creation of a senior lecturership in emergency and critical care (ECC) at the Glasgow veterinary school. The post is being taken up in June by Dr Ava Firth, a Diplomate of the American College of Veterinary Emergency and Critical Care, who is currently clinical training specialist with Vets Now.

**Change of caps** – Vetoquinol is introducing new flip-off plastic caps on its injectable range. First product with the new cap is Marbocyl 10%; others will change during the year. The new caps mean it is no longer necessary to have the aluminium caps which were used to protect the rubber bung and were not always easy to remove, the firm states.

**SAC head of veterinary services** – SAC has appointed Brian Hosie as the new head of veterinary services. He will replace Dr Barti Synge who will be retiring in the summer. A graduate of the Royal (Dick), Mr Hosie has been with SAC for almost 25 years.

**New directors appointed** – Tina Hunt has been appointed veterinary business unit director and Nigel Robinson OTC business unit director at Fort Dodge Animal Health. Mrs Hunt spent 10 years working primarily in equine practice before moving into industry where she has held a variety of technical, sales and management roles, most recently as area business manager at Pfizer. Mr Robinson has moved from the role of finance director which he has held since November 2004.

**International technical manager** – Jane McNae has taken up the newly-created role of international technical manager for ProteXin Veterinary, part of ProteXin International. Since graduating from Grange Veterinary in 1997, Jane has worked in small animal practices in both Hong Kong and the UK, as well as in industry as a technical manager. Another personnel change for Protexin Veterinary is the recent promotion of Dan Marley to UK national sales manager.
How do you ‘value’ an economic recession?

THE papers are full of gloom, the TV news is dire and, on occasion, the temptation to pull the duvet over one’s head and stay in bed for a month can be overwhelming.

Of course, human nature propels us along at an amazing speed because bad news is nearly always about someone else and, however altruistic our approach, murder and mayhem don’t really touch us as individuals.

So, despite whatever may be going on in the world, we continue to go about our business as if nothing has happened. In reality, of course, nothing has usually happened to affect us directly but it’s the indirect effect of distant happenings that can take us by surprise.

Until Christmas last year, how many of us had ever heard of sub-prime mortgages? Even the concept that lending money to impuercious American citizens was actually an established financial sector came as a shock to many of us.

Here, in the UK, people arrange mortgages – whatever they have to do, they do it – and we all cross our fingers that we’ll carry on working enough to meet the costs involved. Perhaps there’s a category of lending here that specialises in similar higher-risk mortgages but most of us had never even vaguely aware of it until Northern Rock hit the headlines.

A reason to do nothing

Now, in roughly the same way that all financial institutions justify their intransigence by citing the Financial Services Authority as a legitimate reason to do nothing, loudly, the collapse of Northern Rock will have no apparent health reason to warrant the trip.

What King was really saying was that this will directly, and adversely, affect the standard of living for those residing in the UK. This will simply fuel the current trend of insecurity surrounding house prices and accelerate an already rising rate of inflation. For most of us, fingers crossed as if we fear the return of the bogeyman, we’re simply holding our breath and hoping that unemployment rates do not increase to further damage the housing market.

In the meantime several things are happening. People are not buying houses, nor are they – mostly – buying new cars, or boats or caravans. Early bookings for summer holidays are down, except at the elite end of the market where cash is still king and sellers are doing expensive deals to shore up the slide lower down.

There are still people wandering into Tiffany, people buying Cristal champagne (a jeroboam of 1999 will set you back £1,475) and sales of Bentley are significantly improved. But this, as in so many other ways, reflects a widening gap in UK society and in people’s ability to pay for the things they want or need.

Unless one is disabled, it’s hard to say that any of us actually needs a dog but most of us find solace or even joy in the companionship of a pet dog or cat. What is apparent, though, is that the costs of owning a pet are increasing along with everything else.

The Feline Advisory Bureau has just launched an excellent initiative – WellCat for life – and, at the launch meeting, showed statistics that confirmed the urban myth that around 50% of the nation’s cats may never see the vet in their lifetime.

Perhaps more worrying was the concern that, while approximately 10% of cat owners are so utterly committed that they will do everything that their vets asks, promptly and without question, a further 40% or so are well-intentioned but largely non-compliant because, as the FAB put it, “Life gets in the way.”

That must be a familiar thought for all of us. How often do we plan to do something but then shelve that plan at the last minute because “life gets in the way”? Doesn’t that apply to us just as much as it does to the clients who visit veterinary practices every day, in every town?

Inexorable fall

If so, how can we be surprised when the data, reflecting our business dynamics, show a steady and inexorable fall-off in the number of active clients per FTE. One doesn’t need to be Mervyn King to put two and two together to predict a further tightening in the numbers of people electing to come into veterinary surgeries when there is no apparent health reason to warrant the trip.

This will most likely be more accenctuated in cats as cat owners are all too well aware of the inherent joy's in trapping and transporting an unwilling cat to the vet. On occasion, one can turn a blind eye to life getting in the way, particularly if it avoids further financial drain, and we should expect this trend to increase unless we manage it directly.

The future doesn’t have to be gloomy but it does require the owners of practices to think creatively to encourage greater traffic through the door at a time when money will be increasingly scarce.

The Feline Advisory Bureau has just come up with some excellent and timely initiatives – National Pet Month, National Flea Week, WellCat for life, to name but three. Let’s put 2008 down as the year when practices joined forces wholeheartedly with industry to bring about change.

We urgently need to change the way in which so many pet owners view their veterinary practices. We need to change the way in which people seek information about their pets and we need to change the passivity with which much of the profession approaches the future.

If money is tight and people elect to come to the practice less frequently, veterinary preventive care will become simply a commodity that pet owners can buy wherever it suits them and decreased frequency of visiting will become a habit.

Some creative thought and a collective burst of energy across the board might just make the difference between holding on to the profession’s ability to steer its own future course or finding that the options available to the profession have been further eroded through an increased degree of financial depression.

No equine visitors allowed at hospital...

A hospital in Hawaii has restated its rules on pets after a man took a horse up in a lift in a bid to cheer up a sick relative with his favourite steed.

Man and beast were stopped by security guards only after reaching the third floor, after apparently passing through the lobby unchallenged.

The patient was allowed to see them but it turned out to be the wrong horse.

A hospital spokeswoman said there was a visitation policy for dogs and cats, but not for horses.

Security managed to remove the visitor and the horse with just a few scuff marks, she added.
Quantity and quality at year’s big event

THE BSAVA president, Frances Barr, narrowly achieved every president’s ambition to reign over a record congress. It was announced at the AGM that the number of delegate days had beaten the previous year’s total by one!

However, quantity is not the only criterion by which a congress should be judged – quality is far more important. The prevailing view seemed to be that she had managed to crown her year on both scores.

My first encounter after arrival on Thursday at midday was to cross her proud parent’s path: Jennifer and Alastair Porter were for once basking in her reflected glory and Alastair was like the cat that had got the cream.

My first encounter with science was the stimulating and masterly presentation by Baroness Greenfield on Consciousness. Her delivery, centre stage, without notes, away from the lectern, was reminiscent of David Cameron’s delivery at last year’s Tory party conference. Even more fascinating was her unfiltering use of the English language, combining humour and throw-away lines that reminded one of Victoria Wood.

An early encounter with Roger Green established that he was (at last) retired from doing locums – as he found his preferred treatments were gradually disappearing from the dispensary shelves. Not that he has given up work completely. He still provides his experience as an expert witness. In these days of litigation-minded clientele, his is a name worth noting!

I heard that The World of James Herriot Museum in Thirsk is under threat as the local authority says it cannot afford to continue its annual grant. The museum might have to close but there are moves afoot to save it. We shall hear more of this, no doubt, as it deserves to be saved, as much as the London Poisons Unit which is also threatened with closure.

The grapevine informs me that a possible remedy is an annual practice subscription set on the basis of the number of vets in the practice and a consultation fee for each referral.

The Commercial Exhibition provided the usual alternative of continuing education on products, old and new, from characters similarly old and new. One old hand was David James, founder of DRM Dental, who supplied me with my first reliable dental scaler some 28 years ago. Indeed, he told me he had only recently been to South Croydon to service it, and it was still going strong, like David!

Sporting prowess

He was once the World No. 3 Latin American Dancer as well as a member of the Peggy Spencer Latin American Formation Team when they were World Champions. He actually batted in a Kent match with Dennis Compton when he was 15, at the same age, he played in the Arsenal B Team – until he broke his arm and had to leave. I suggested it was a good job he did not break his leg or they might have put him down.

Schering-Plough Animal Health, a congress sponsor, enlarged since last year’s acquisition of Intervet, launched its new product, Zylkène, at congress. I was informed it takes the stress out of life in the same way that mother’s milk has a calming effect on the newborn in the first few days of life. It contains a bioactive decapentapeptide, derived from casein, but is not broken down by pepsin.

I commented that Zylkène would therefore be undigested until it was in the small intestine when it encountered trypsin. The young lady expressed surprise that I would know that; in much the same way that I was encouraged to learn that my memory was better than I thought!

David Hallas, Schering-Plough’s general manager, was flying in from the USA overnight Friday and was due to land at Heathrow early morning on Saturday. It should have been in good time for his arrival to participate with 100 invited vets at the product launch and the lunch afterwards.

Unfortunately, he was flying BA into Terminal 5. He did, in fact, arrive in Birmingham late afternoon, miraculously with his luggage. We hope he had some Zylkène with him.

Attracted to the Bayer HealthCare stand by new claims for Advocate, it appears that this has much potential already but more for the future as global warming increases the incidence of lungworm, as well as heartworm. According to Bayer, 38% of vets in one survey have had suspected or confirmed cases of lungworm in the UK. Not always easy to diagnose, it is obviously something to bear in mind.

2Sys Ltd offers a practice management computer system based solely on an internet connection and browser. You do not need a server or practice software and it is claimed to save on capital investment. You do not need to back-up and clients can log onto their own account, monitor patient progress, check statements, order repeat prescriptions, pay bills and so on.

There is more to it than just that but you can learn more from the website, www.2sys.co.uk, an unfortunate name perhaps! However, some ISPs and phone connections to broadband are not always that reliable so there may be pluses and minuses.

My packed lunch on Saturday included a bottle of Johnson’s Orange and Raspberry Juice that was remarkably palatable, although one vet at our table remarked that the last time he saw a similar liquid was in a bitch with pyometra!

Information service

Sunday saw the AGM which has tended to be somewhat mundane in recent years and not as lively as in the early days when I started attending BSAVA congress.

This year, however, we were treated to the award of honorary membership to Bruce V. Jones, a founder member of the BSAVA who initiated a scientific information service on behalf of the association with all the abstracts of possible interest to members. From this grew the first BSAVA publication, which gave rise to the JSAP under his editorship.

One must not forget he is the Jones of Jones’ Animal Nursing! It culminated in his hard work producing the commemorative booklet for the association’s fiftieth anniversary in 2007. This recognition was not before time and greeted with acclamation.

The AGM came to an end after Frances Barr handed over to her boss at the Bristol vet school, Ed Hall.
Among the many delegates from overseas this year was Ambreen (known as Nonee) Magre. After qualifying in Kenya nearly 20 years ago, she spent 12 years at the Stone Lion Veterinary Centre in Wimbledon, later moving to practices in New Malden and then Croydon before returning to Wimbledon; she completed the CertVOphthal in 1997. Returning to Kenya she has worked for the KSPCA for the past five years, mainly doing neutering and vaccination work, carrying out up to 30 operations a day with little help and minimal equipment – and no anaesthetic machine, and dealing with all in-patients for free. Nonee, who lives with her parents, also works with children in some of the poorest areas of Nairobi. Although she enjoys what she is doing she is toying with the idea of returning to the UK and setting up her own practice.

The Royal Canin Pet Health Counsellor of the Year awards dinner was held during the congress. The overall winner was selected from a short list of six of the Pet Health Counsellor of the Month winners. Sarah Heath (fourth from left), who was one of the judges, presented the award for Pet Health Counsellor of the Year, with £1,500 travel vouchers, to Jan Stevenson (sixth from left) from Severn Veterinary Centre, Worcestershire. The judges were impressed with “her innovative approach to clinics in practice and that she was able to demonstrate the impact these can have on a practice’s profile and profitability”.

Between them is Gudi Stuttard of Royal Canin. The others on the shortlist were (from left): Rachel Burbridge, Wessex Vets, Somerset; Dawn Childs, Bishop Stortford Vet Hospital; Michelle Herbert, Abbey Vet Group, Berkshire; Lydia Downes, Burghley Vet Centre, Lincoln; and Clare O’Dwyer, Priory Clinic, Norfolk. They are shown with Andrew Doyle, sales director at Royal Canin.

If your practice has that WOW! factor, then you should enter the 2008 WOW! Awards being run by Veterinary Practice in association with Paradigm Design. We want to pay tribute to excellence in the design of front-of-house appearance and facilities in veterinary practices, both large and small. The judges will look for imaginative and innovative approaches and ideas, which promote higher standards of care for both clients and patients and help make visits to practices a pleasurable and memorable experience.

Please use the entry form – available to download from the website www.veterinary-practice.com (which also has full details) or by post from Veterinary Practice (30 Diamond Ridge, Camberley, Surrey GU15 4LD; telephone 01276 686654, fax 01276 63307) – to tell us, in up to 200 words, why your practice deserves to win one of the 2008 awards and also send up to a maximum of 10 photographs covering the main areas.

There are two categories:
1. practices with no more than 10 full-time (or FTE) staff
2. practices with more than 10 full-time (or FTE) staff

Entries close on Thursday 10th July 2008

Jurying will take place during the summer; the results will be announced in the October issue of Veterinary Practice.

The prizes: each of the two winning practices will receive £500; a gourmet meal will be arranged for up to four staff from each of the winners where the presentation will be made; a certificate to display in the practice; the winners will be featured in Veterinary Practice.

The Merck Veterinary Manual is well known in the veterinary profession. Now a companion volume has been published for pet owners: The Merck/Merial Manual for Pet Health. Dr Scott Line, associate editor of both publications, attended the BSAVA congress to launch the weighty volume – it has over 1,350 pages – in the UK. With more than 200 contributors from around the world – including Andrew Bathe, Caroline Hahn, Svend Kold, Maureen Milne, Peter Holmes, Mong Kerr and Stuart Taylor from the UK – it focuses on preventive care and animal health advice for dogs, cats, horses, birds, fish, reptiles and other exotic pets. Published in America last November with a print run of 250,000, more than 120,000 have already been sold and there are plans for translations into several languages. It is published on a not-for-profit basis through an educational partnership between Merck and Merial and will be sold through bookshops.
GENITRIX first appeared on the veterinary scene at the BSAVA congress in 1998.

That year, the firm’s founder, Howard Wilder, invested in four posters and 500 leaflets and placed his entire stock of products on a picnic table in the smallest shell stand he could get in the exhibition hall in the ICC – this was in the days before the exhibition outgrew the convention centre and moved to the National Indoor Arena.

All the stock was sold and all the leaflets handed out and Howard, having removed the posters and table, went off to buy more – and so the business got under way, and has never looked back.

For the past three years it has been the fastest growing veterinary medicines company in the UK and has steadily been expanding its product range. At that first congress, Howard had Arthrotabs, a mobility supplement for dogs, and Lacto B, one of the first probiotics on the UK market. There has been a regular stream of new products since then, including Xenex Ultra, the first insecticide developed for small furries, HY-50 Vet, a sodium hyaluronate injection for horses, and Xeno-450, an ivermectin derivative.

At this year’s congress the firm launched Dentagen, a dental plaque protection system for dogs and cats, and RIP Fleas Extra, a new formulation of its environmental flea treatment (further details of both products are on the “products” page).

The firm’s marketing director, Rob Watkins, says that since its launch in 2005, RIP Fleas has broken all records, becoming the fastest growing product in the market.

The company, now beginning its 11th year, is based in a two-storey building close to Billingshurst Station in West Sussex, and is determined, says Mr Wilder, to remain a fast-growing independent supplier of specialist products to veterinary practices.
Essential fatty acids (EFA's) have been shown to improve skin barrier function, which is particularly important in dogs with sensitive skin. Boracutin incorporates 200mg of the omega 6 Gamma Linolenic Acid (GLA) with 40mg of the omega 3 Eicosapentaenoic Acid (EPA) in a tasty carob chocolate tablet. This combination, based on clinical work, is an optimum concentration of 5:1 to help in the management of dogs with irritated skin to help reduce dryness and itching.

Carob does not contain the caffeine stimulant theobromine, which can be fatal to some dogs. Carob is also rich in vitamin A, B1, B2, E and niacin and is high in calcium, magnesium and iron.
Trying to understand ‘consciousness’

SOMETHING disappears every time a veterinary surgeon administers an anaesthetic to his or her patient – and if we knew what exactly it was, we would have the answer to the most intriguing of all puzzles, neuroscientist Susan Greenfield told the BSAVA congress.

Baroness Greenfield has spent her entire career trying to answer the question, “What is consciousness?”, and admits that she is no nearer to formulating a definitive answer than when she began.

But studies in neurology departments around the world are providing a better model for explaining how the subjective experience of consciousness is generated in the brain and how this produces the different levels of consciousness observed in different species and at different times within the same individual.

Brain imaging techniques such as PET (Positron Emission Tomography) have been used to compare the activity of the human brain when awake and unconscious. These have shown only differences in the amount but not the location of activity, so there is no single “centre” in the brain responsible for the experience of consciousness, she said.

In any case, the temporal resolution of any conventional imaging methods would be too slow to identify the short-lived phenomena that constitute conscious thoughts. However, electrophysiological studies have identified a plausible candidate in the waves of electrical activity that circulate around particular regions of the brain with a frequency of 40Hz. But as this same phenomenon could occur in a section of brain in a dish, it is not the whole story, she said.

In reality, consciousness is likely to result from an interplay between several different factors. This include the networks of neuronal connections established between brain cells in response to an individual’s experience – of which there is a far greater complexity within human brain than in, say, a goldfish, she pointed out.

Sensory stimuli
Others include the effects of sensory stimuli which cause waves of electrical activity like the waves caused by a stone falling into water. But there are also biochemical factors, neuropeptides which control the level of arousal in the brain and so control the strength of those electrical ripples. But they also communicate with the rest of the body so that the brain is not functioning in isolation.

In opening her lecture at the congress, Baroness Greenfield recalled much earlier in her career holding in her hand a formalin-fixed human brain and wondering how that unprepossessing lump of grey tissue could encapsulate the personality, thoughts, dreams and emotions of its former owner. At the end, she acknowledged that her presentation would not have provided the answer.

“I am still asking the same question an embarrassing number of decades later. Although I may not have got to the real answer of how water is turned into wine, I hope I have convinced you that neuroscience can bring something to the party and permit some interesting experiments on issues that otherwise we would have to leave to the philosophers.”

‘Pet health plans’ launched

Stephen Gates, managing director, with Gudrun Ravetz (left), veterinary consultant, and Juliet Long, new product development manager for The Practice Business, a trading name of Deepplan and part of the AXA group, at the launch of the firm’s payments scheme for veterinary practices during the BSAVA congress. It involves monthly payments by clients for preventive healthcare for dogs and cats. “The plans complement standard pet insurance and cover important routine treatment,” explained Juliet Long. Interest-free loans can be arranged for non-routine treatment.

Winchester-based firm runs similar schemes in the dental field. For details telephone 0800 169 9958 or e-mail enquiries@pethealthplans.co.uk.

BSAVA CONGRESS

PRIZEWINNERS AT THE CONGRESS

Twelve delegates won Nintendo Ws in prize draws on the Hill’s stand: James Hamilton of the Pet Vaccination Clinic in Nuneaton; A. Kinch of the Springfield Vet Group in Sheffield; Anira Gandhi of the PDSA in Coventry; Miss C. E. Hipsher of Castle Vets in Reading; Miss A. M. Ruff of Hornchurch; Miss H. Stratwood of Riverside Veterinary Centre in Stratford upon Avon; Caroline Galdas of Yorkshire Vets in Bradford; Clare Treacher of Passey Place Vets in London; Mr N. T. Rudram of Priory Close Vet Surgery in Tauron; Miss K. Bennett of Aylesbury; Tina Sworer of Coombefield Veterinary Hospital in Aynsley; and Kirsty Preston of R. S. Dowding in Gainsborough.

Louise Turley, of the Vale Veterinary Group in Tiverton, beat 606 other entrants to win Ceva Animal Health’s quiz, run to mark the launch of Prilactone and Skoosh, at the BSAVA congress. She won a new iPod Touch.
“Worms? Absolutely Not!”

Roundworms, tapeworms, whipworms and hookworms – Drontal is the only wormer to kill every type of intestinal worm commonly found in UK dogs and cats.

† GfK data (MAT sales by value) Jan ‘08

Drontal Plus Flavour Tablets. Each tablet contains 50 mg praziquantel, 144 mg pyrantel embonate and 150 mg febantel.

Drontal Plus XL Tablets. Each tablet contains 175 mg praziquantel, 504 mg pyrantel embonate and 525 mg febantel.

Drontal Cat Tablets. Each tablet contains 230 mg pyrantel embonate and 20 mg praziquantel.

Drontal Cat XL Tablets. Each tablet contains 345 mg pyrantel embonate and 30 mg praziquantel.

Please refer to appropriate data sheet. Further information available on request. ® Registered Trade Mark of Bayer AG. Bayer plc, Animal Health Division, Bayer House, Strawberry Hill, Newbury RG14 1JA. Tel: 01635 563000.

www.stopwormsdead.co.uk
Dental plaque protection system

GENITRIX has launched Dentagen, a dental plaque protection system for dogs and cats. The company says it offers a new solution to existing dental treatments, for which client compliance can be poor, with clinical trials demonstrating its ability to significantly inhibit the formation of plaque.

The active principle is a plant extract called RF2 and the product operates as an “anti-biofilm” treatment by modifying the membrane of oral bacteria to prevent them from producing plaque even at low concentrations.

The product differs from existing dental products, says Genitrix, in offering an integrated treatment regime involving both the practice and the pet owner.

Dentagen wax is presented for practice use in a syringe for easy application to the gingival layer and the buccal area of teeth. The initial protective coating of wax is applied to dogs or cats at the end of dental procedures in practice and while the animal is still sedated. The coating lasts for two to three days.

Dog owners can then maintain the protective coating by giving their pet Dentagen plaque prevention chews every other day. These chews, impregnated with RF2 and of a specially designed shape and consistency, are supplied in two sizes with the larger size designed for dogs over 8kg and a smaller size for dogs less than 8kg.

Katy Horton of White Hart Lane Vets, who has trialled the product, commented: “The Dentagen wax was certainly very easy to apply and, from the small sample of dogs we’ve so far tried it on, the palatability of the chews was good.

“While tooth-brushing remains the gold standard for dental care, we recognise that it can be difficult for owners and believe that this new approach could be a valuable alternative.”

Five syringes of Dentagen wax for application in practice cost £12.50. Packs of nine small chews cost £5.10 and a pack of the larger chews £6.50.

Flea treatment reformulated

RIP Fleas, the environmental flea treatment from Genitrix, has been given a new formulation, says the firm, to ensure it acts more quickly in the killing of adult fleas and that it continues to kill fleas as they emerge from pupae for up to 12 months.

Now known as RIP Fleas Extra, the product is also licensed for the control of house dust mites in the environment for up to 12 months.

The reformulation is said to make the product the only environmental flea treatment to contain three active ingredients while complying fully with new EU Biocides regulations. It is the only such treatment to be fragranced and is also the only product to be presented in a volume which will cover 120 square metres – the size of an average house.

It contains: tetramethrin – a second generation synthetic pyrethroid and a contact insecticide with a rapid knockdown action of insect pests; permethrin – a potent insecticide with a powerful contact action on insects but with a low toxicity to most mammals; and methoprene – a compound that mimics the insect juvenile hormone and arrests development of fleas and house dust mites in the environment.

When used synergistically, tetramethrin and permethrin provide a rapid knockdown and kill of fleas as they hatch from pupae. The firm reports that studies have shown that this combination works four times more quickly than permethrin alone.

Two new products for dogs

VIRBAC has introduced Suprelorin, a contraceptive implant for male dogs which, the firm states, provides a pioneering method for effective, temporary de-sexing for a six-month period. “Testosterone is safely suppressed to deliver the same results as castration, yet eliminates the need for surgery,” it says.

“The implants can be used in combination with annual vaccinations and as part of a general health programme for the patient, while owners can assess the benefits of de-sexing prior to making a decision about surgery.”

Also new from Virbac is Ypoxane for the treatment of benign prostate hyperplasia in dogs. This is a long-acting anti-androgen targeting the prostate, while maintaining reproductive function. Tablets are available in four different strengths for dogs of all sizes.

The firm says the product provides rapid clinical benefits, visible within a week of treatment, that last for six months in correctly treated dogs. “The convenience of the short, seven-day treatment period and oral route promote owner compliance and therefore treatment success,” Virbac reports.

Hyperthyroidism in cats treatment

INTERVET UK has launched Vidalta (carbimazole), which it describes as the first hyperthyroidism drug to be fully effective with once daily administration.

It is the first 24-hour sustained release formulation for the treatment of hyperthyroidism in cats which is reported to deliver a rapid, long-term, practical and reliable method to treat and stabilise the condition.

Trials have shown that clinical signs of hyperthyroidism may be eliminated within 10 days of commencing treatment.

There are two tablet strengths in two pack sizes: Vidalta 10mg and Vidalta 15mg in 30 tablet packs for early treatment.

Latest collar

Kruuse UK has expanded the Baxter range of Elizabethan collars with the introduction of a Baxter Comfort Collar. This new design is described as softer and more flexible and has a soft rubber outer edge for better comfort for the animal. The collars are available in seven sizes ranging from 7.5 to 30cm.

Hand-held x-ray machine

Clark Dental has introduced the Nomad hand-held x-ray machine from Aribex. The operator is protected by a patented internal radiation shield as well as an external backscatter shield. One operator would have to expose over 10,000 E-speed films per year in order to approach the lowest measurable dose on a monitoring badge, the firm states. Two rechargeable batteries provide 150 exposures each, and it is compatible with both digital sensors and traditional x-ray film. Details are available from Clark Dental, telephone 01279 613750, e-mail marcus@clarkdental.co.uk

stabilisation and in 100 tablet packs for long-term maintenance.

Four licensed generics

DECRA is expanding its Veterinary Essentials portfolio of veterinary licensed generics with the introduction of four new products.

These are Flexicam, a NSAID for the control of pain and inflammation in dogs with acute and chronic musculo-skeletal disorders (which joins the range following the acquisition of VetXX); Predcin 25, the first veterinary licensed 25mg strength prednisolone; and a new combination of sedation and reversal agents – Sedator (medetomidine hydrochloride) and Atipam, an alpha-2-adrenoceptor antagonist.

Dechra has also introduced a margin and profit calculator which is said to provide an instant analysis of how much can be saved when stocking veterinary licensed generic products over an equivalent.

Equine anthelmintic launched

CHANTELLE Animal Health has launched Animec Paste for Horses.

Animec (ivermectin) 18.7mg/g oral paste is presented in a calibrated dosing syringe which includes a locking-ring for accurate dosing. It is indicated for the treatment of roundworms, bloodworms, pinworms, neck threadworms and bots and is said to be ideal for rotational worming.

Gastro-intestinal diet

PROTEXIN Veterinary has launched...
Pro-Balance, which it describes as a therapeutic GI diet. It is the first such diet to contain an added probiotic, Enterococcus faecium, and also contains Protecin Preplex, a multi-sourced prebiotic.

Low in fibre, it has low to moderate fat levels with Omega 3 fatty acids to help reduce gastro-intestinal inflammation. There are two pack sizes of 1kg and 3kg.

**New model of CIDR device**

A NEW model of the controlled internal drug release (CIDR) device for oestrus synchronisation in cows and maiden heifers has been introduced by Pfizer Animal Health.

The CIDR-1380 supersedes the CIDR-1900 and has been re-designed for reduced invasiveness and minimal contact with the reproductive tract’s internal surfaces consistent with achieving the target rate of progesterone absorption.

According to Pfizer’s senior livestock veterinary surgeon, Carolyn Hogan, improved functionality has allowed the total progesterone content to be reduced to 1,380mg per device without reducing the efficacy, in line with responsible design parameters to avoid over-supply of medicinal active ingredients.

**Liver function supplement**

EQUISTRO has introduced Legaphytton for the support of liver function. It incorporates Siliphos, a complex of concentrated milk thistle fruit extract and phospholipids, and is a source of readily available carbohydrates.

The product is available in 900g packs, which is sufficient for 30 days for a standard 500kg horse.

**‘Best home flea treatment’**

INDOREX household flea spray has been voted the Best Home Flea Treatment by readers of Your Dog magazine, the biggest circulation dog journal in the UK.

Virbac reports that it is the only product to kill adult fleas and dust mites and prevent the development of their eggs and larvae for two months, providing 12-month’s protection from a single application. This, plus its ease of use with no residual smell, has made it the leading environmental flea control product available through vets, says the firm, with over one million cans sold.

**Antimicrobial re-named**

COLISCOUR is the new name for Colivet solution, a soluble antimicrobial for pigs from Ceva. It is the UK’s only colistin-based antimicrobial.

Phil McGuire, Ceva’s business unit manager, said the change of name was the easiest way to avoid confusion between this product and a totally different non-prescription product of a similar name.

**New locum recruitment guides**

RIG Vet Recruitment has added two new titles to its range of personnel recruitment guides with the introduction of “Rig’s Practice VN Guide” and “Rig’s Locum VN Guide”.

Using a similar format to the other guides covering employing locum veterinary surgeons, the new leaflets offer basic information and advice laid out in an A5 format accompanied by light-hearted cartoons.

“At the end of last year, we conducted a survey among some vet nurses and frankly were surprised at how little information on practice admin and procedures some VNs were given on their first day,” said Justin Carpenter, the firm’s managing director.

“For example, 88% were not given a formal induction, 78% were not advised on fire and health and safety regulations, and when expected to undertake reception work, 97% were not informed on phone protocols or appointment systems.”

For copies, contact the firm on 01392 332858.

---

**Computer systems for the veterinary practice**

- Speed and reliability using Microsoft Windows and SQL Server
- Includes features specifically required by Equine, Farm and Small Animal practice
- Multiple branches easily and inexpensively handled using the power of SQL replication
- Incorporates batch traceability, bar-code scanning and electronic ordering
- Comprehensive storage within clinical history of x-rays, ID diagrams, dental charts, photographs, lab reports, documents and emails
- You can even take a laptop on visits – running your complete practice system

For further information or to arrange for a demonstration at your practice please call our team on 07000 643744

Ventana Veterinary Systems, Consulsoft Limited, The Old Smithy, Brooks Lane, Middlewich, Cheshire CW10 0JH
Fax: 01606 832970 Email: sales@midshire.com Web: www.midshire.com
Veterinary surgeons and quality food

A RECENT conference entitled South West Excellence leading the way in food, farming and tourism had speakers demonstrating a firm intention to develop farm produce as a major initiative.

These were not the usual farmer representatives bemoaning the lack of profitability but specialists exulting the excellence of available farm produce. Underpinning the discussions was a recognition that healthy animals are delivered for consumption and that quality food comes from green, welfare-friendly production.

At the South West Dairy Event, a direct linkage was shown between the efforts of veterinary surgeons on behalf of their clients and the produce that is sold as a direct result of health planning.

The Delaware Veterinary Group in Somerset had buffalo sausages, various cheeses and other tasty things on its stand, the produce from clients’ farms. It seems important that veterinary advice and action is clearly seen as a part of the food production chain.

Much work needs to be done to achieve this and one of the benefits may be that quality restaurants will welcome veterinary surgeons as informed customers. A highlight has already been given to the chef of the year that the smell of disinfectant on a stand, the produce from clients’ farms.

Marketing pride

Michael Caines, two-star Michelin chef and businessman, described the pride taken within his hotels and restaurants in marketing the difference in the food and hospitality on offer.

A local hotel has more than doubled its turnover by offering local produce and as the hotel business grows so do the businesses of the supplying producers. International recognition of the hotel also gives recognition to the suppliers. Utilising the local larder enables a food culture to be developed which customers appreciate.

An example of producing air-dried pork and beef was highlighted by Jean Cole. She and her husband have developed an air drying process that produces salami that is equivalent to traditional salami from southern Europe. The greatest compliment she received was from a customer who simply believed that the product had to be imported. Prime Cornish beef and pork is dried and matured.

Both she and Mark Sharman, Sharpham wines and unpasteurised cheese, have resisted approaches from supermarkets to retail their products. As small producers, sufficient demand is currently generated by specialist outlets. However, the wine needed to be taken up by recognised outlets in London before local restaurants took it up.

Adding value

Technical expertise is required to introduce change and to add value. Currently there are 214 million trips of visitors to Devon and Cornwall alone with a spend of £4.6 billion. The South West has 18% of the national land area with 50,000 registered holdings and 20,000 farmers.

The agricultural output is three times that of Wales and there are 150 different cheeses produced within the region. Regional branding is important. Emphasis is to be placed on producer support, quality assurance and communication to change perceptions.

RCVS QUESTION TIME IN ILMINSTER

The final RCVS regional question time of the current presidential year is to be held at the Shrubbery Hotel in Ilminster, Somerset, on Thursday 22nd May. The evening starts at 6.30pm with food and drink, followed by question time at 7.15 with the meeting finishing at around 10pm.

Bob Moore will chair the meeting and the panel will be made up of the officer team and Veterinary Nurses Council chairman Andrea Jeffery.

To book a place, contact Fiona Clark at the RCVS on 02072 020773 or f.clark@rcvs.org.uk before 9th May.

Robert C. Clark, Penrith
Preventive health initiatives
LINKS Vet Group in Haddington, Scotland, has introduced a series of preventive health initiatives for pets. As well as introducing programmes for animals to treat the early signs of allergic skin disease, spot genetic risks of blindness and treat arthritis, specialist programmes are being drawn up for both overweight and elderly animals.

The group’s Glen Watson explains: “These initiatives aim to both educate pet owners in spotting conditions early and give their pets the opportunity to undergo treatments to prevent complications in the future.”

The initiatives proved incredibly popular when piloted in late 2007, he says, and this year sees the introduction of diet management, arthritis treatment and allergic skin care plans.

Discounted healthcare plans for cats and dogs have been introduced and a Horse Health Plan, for horse owners who would like to have annual clinical health checks performed on their animals, is also in the pipeline.

The practice has used its database to identify patients who are deemed genetically at risk of certain conditions, or who have exhibited symptoms which might act as a marker for the emergence of disease at a later stage.

Where appropriate, owners have been contacted and invited to attend the surgery for appropriate screening examinations. A recent client education evening on canine arthritis was attended by 150.

The Links Vet Group has been operating in Haddington, East Lothian, since the mid 19th century and currently has clinics in the centre of Haddington, Dunbar, Musselburgh and North Berwick.

The Haddington Clinic is moving to new purpose-built premises later this year which will provide double the immediate working capacity.

Donations sought for Benin project
AFTER raising over £30,000 to build a wall that will stop snakes from invading a school in Benin, Jacqui Molyneux, who runs the Prince Bishop Veterinary Hospital in Leadgate near Consett, County Durham, along with Rotary Club colleagues, has raised money to build a library.

Once equipped, this will introduce the children to computers as well as TV and video for the first time in their lives. As well as securing sponsorship to fund 17 youngsters through school at £90 a year, she has had vital medical equipment from her practice, including an ultrasound machine, converted from animal to human use and transported to the region. Jacqui aims to raise the £13,000 needed to fully equip the library by the end of this summer, and is seeking donations from individuals and businesses. Cheques payable to The West Africa Trust should be sent to: The West Africa Trust, c/o Newton Press, St Cuthbert’s Way, Newton Aycliffe, Co. Durham DH5 6DX.

Involving the nation’s pet owners
MARC Abraham, who frequently appears on the Paul O’Grady Show on Channel 4, is setting up a new website, www.thepet.net, which, he says, is aimed at involving the nation’s pet owners to revolutionise the pet industry.

“The website aims to be the most trusted and up-to-date source of pet information available,” he states.

He adds: “After working in the pet industry as a vet for 13 years, I believe it’s time for a much-needed shake-up. Increasing corporate attitudes, widespread complacency and lack of the personal touch are turning pets into luxury items when they were once just a normal part of everyone’s family.”

The MRSA seminars 2008
An in-depth look at the threat of MRSA to veterinary practice. Leading experts discuss MRSA, along with practical advice to help you control and tackle it.

Guest Speakers include:
Prof. David Lloyd
BVetMed, PhD, DipECVD, ILTM, FRCVS

Dr. Tim Nuttall
BSc, BVSc, PhD, CertVD, CBiol, MRCPV

Ms. Amanda Boag
MA, VetMB, DipACVIM, DipACVECC, MRCVS

FRIDAY 9TH MAY 2008
THURROCK – EAST LONDON
Prof. David Lloyd
BVetMed, PhD, DipECVD, ILTM, FRCVS

Prof. Mark Enright
BVSc, PhD

Dr. Susan Dawson

TUESDAY 13TH MAY 2008
NEWCASTLE
Dr. Tim Nuttall
BSc, BVSc, PhD, CertVD, CBiol, MRCPV

Dr. Giles Edwards
MB, BS, MA, PhD, MRCVS

Dr. Nicola Williams
BVSc, PhD

WEDNESDAY 14TH MAY 2008
CHEADLE - SOUTH MANCHESTER
Dr. Tim Nuttall
BSc, BVSc, PhD, CertVD, CBiol, MRCPV

Dr. Giles Edwards
MB, BS, MA, PhD, MRCVS

Dr. Susan Dawson

TUESDAY 20TH MAY 2008
LEAMINGTON SPA
Ms. Amanda Boag
MB, BS, MA, PhD, DipECVD, ILTM, FRCVS

Mr. Jonathan Otter

Dr. Nicola Williams
BVSc, PhD

For further information:
contact your Janssen Animal Health territory manager or Helen Milton on: 01494 567358 or email: ahealth@jagb.jnj.com
The battle for the profession’s future

A COVERT philosophical “battle” is taking place in the United States over the future structure of small animal (pet) veterinary practice.

Most of the participants are unaware that a battle is going on because they are either part of the proud and paradigm-insulated group that is responsible for getting the profession to where it is today, or they have the silo perspective that marks a profession dominated by small, separate, and isolated work centers.

Nevertheless, I believe that we are at an important inflection point regarding the future structure of pet practice: will the dominant practice model be “general practice” embracing wellness care, preventive medicine, and sickness (reactive) care and supported by clinical specialty referral practices for rare and challenging cases, or, will the profession continue to adopt the human medicine practice model of providing expensive and inconvenient reactive care by a multitude of clinical specialists, with general practice relegated to providing routine health and sickness evaluations and triage services?

Proponents of the latter model are mainly clinical specialists who seem to equate quality medicine with sophisticated technologies and believe that two to four years of additional clinical training and experience (i.e. internships and residencies) and board certification are necessary in order to practise quality medicine.

This, of course, is the model followed by human medicine in the US. However, there is now widespread agreement that this reactive human medicine practice model, although capable of delivering daily miracles, is too expensive and inconvenient – and failing to provide the care wanted by broad segments of society.

In veterinary medicine, approximately one third of new graduates of US veterinary schools now apply for such clinical specialty track training programmes, believing that this is essential for success in veterinary practice.

As a result, specialty practices are being established in virtually every urban environment. General practices are being urged to refer cases to such practices, and many school clinical faculties now advocate such referrals as representing the new standard of care.

Senior veterinary students who rotate through clinical specialty clinics repeatedly hear that, “If you see a case like this, you should refer it to someone like me – a specialist!”

I suspect that the same battle is quietly changing the face of veterinary medicine in the UK and Europe, too. In this and future articles, I will illustrate through specific vignettes how the “battle” is being waged and the implications for practice.

It is important that we understand the current state at the macro level so that we, as general practitioners, have a chance to participate thoughtfully rather than be caught unaware after the battle is over! I hope that these comments generate some vigorous discussion!

Reactive practice

In the United States, human medical practice is essentially entirely reactive: practitioners have almost completely lost any role in wellness care and preventive medicine. Such services can now be obtained through pharmacies, large stores and, increasingly, via the internet.

Self-care is the dominant wellness model in the US and is extending its reach into reactive care through web-based systems and the ready availability of prescription drugs, vaccines, etc., through internet sites.

Similarly, food animal practice in the US has largely gone the same route as practitioners have persisted in playing reactive roles (being part of the problem) while farmers wanted...
An ethical dilemma?

A number of infectious diseases are currently sweeping across the US, driven by people movement, lack of geographical barriers, and perhaps by climate change and the migration of vectors. Examples include heartworm, West Nile virus, Lyme disease, anaplasmosis, ehrlichiosis, babesiosis, etc.

In the future, it could include SARS, avian flu, monkey pox, leishmaniasis, etc.

It seems that if an infectious disease is endemic anywhere, it can now become endemic everywhere! This presents us with an interesting ethical dilemma which depends upon whether one takes a micro (individual pet) view or a macro (pet population) view and how one answers the question, “When is it appropriate to initiate preventive treatments for infectious disease?”

Should one try to prevent a disease from becoming endemic in an area (e.g. Oregon) by initiating a vaccination programme (e.g. for West Nile virus), or should one wait for it to become endemic before it is justified in trying to prevent it?

The predominant opinion in the US, focused as we are on reactive medicine and the individual pet (member of the family), is that exposing it to unnecessary risk is viewed as unethical.

On the other hand, not working to prevent a serious disease from becoming endemic when the means (vaccine) are on hand surely must also be unethical, but only if one views the larger picture of population health which only secondarily affects the individual pet.

I have been aware of this ever since our practice was accused of being unethical because we recommended heartworm preventive treatment in our north-western region hospitals. Dogma had it that the disease did not occur in these states because the ambient temperature did not support the full development cycle of the parasite.

Fortunately, we had hospitals in most states and had been able to track the disease’s spread westward and northward into these states. This is a privilege that practitioners in single, stand-alone practices do not have. It allows us to see the bigger picture as well as understand the dynamics of disease spread.

It also raises our awareness of how important it is to our patients and clients for us to prevent disease rather than wait for it to arise and then treat it. It also raises the clear responsibility we have to share our knowledge with our colleagues in the veterinary profession.

Risk assessments

So, how does this tie in to the “battle” mentioned above? We have become aware that resistance to disease prevention measures predominantly comes from our clinical specialty colleagues who are oriented to reactive medicine by virtue of their clinical disciplines (problem first, solution second) and individual pet focus.

Because of their clinical expertise and reputations, they understandably dominate groups and panels making medical recommendations. In view of their orientation, they naturally advocate performing risk assessments for each pet prior to initiating preventive care (vaccination, heartworm prevention, etc.).

In cases where the disease in question is rare because it is not yet endemic, it is viewed as all risk and no benefit – and hence any preventive treatment would be untenable. As a result, advocating measures to prevent a disease from becoming endemic is viewed as quite unethical and constituting “malpractice” to some.

This view reflects their reactive, patient-centric perspective. General practices are more attuned to the need for preventive care of their patient population, but can be intimidated by these “practice standards-setting” groups.

Travel by both people and animals and the translocation of cultural practices are also starting to affect the animal disease spectrum in the USA and UK. We must guard against letting the move towards a focus on the needs of the individual pet get in the way of making sensible decisions to prevent the rise of new endemic diseases.
Draft Marine Bill promises much

APRIL saw the publication of the British Government’s draft Marine Bill, a long-awaited move to give added protection to British marine life and to designate a new network of marine nature reserves.

One of the functions of the Bill will be to create a new agency known as the Marine Management Organisation, which will enforce the relevant environmental legislation and regulate developments such as offshore wind farms.

The RSPB has given a cautious welcome to the Bill’s publication in the hope that robust environmental protection laws will follow. However, it has some concerns that the Bill will simply involve “a rehash of the current, ineffective legislation”.

Why do we need to give our coastline and territorial waters more protection than they currently receive? Well, consider that at present only 0.001% of UK seas have high levels of protection from damaging activities. And that Sally Bailey of the conservation group WWF UK reckons: “There is a considerable body of work suggesting that a network of marine protected areas should cover from 20-30% of waters, with some work even suggesting as much as 40%.”

So there is obviously huge scope for the Bill with currently just three highly-protected marine reserves in UK waters: Lundy Island off the north Devon coast; Strangford Lough in Northern Island; and Skomer in Pembrokeshire.

And whilst all seabirds in the UK are protected when they are on land, there is no protection extended (other than in the three reserves mentioned), to those areas of sea next to where they breed and in which they need to fish.

Conservation zones

Bearing this in mind the RSPB has just published a report, Safeguarding our Seabirds, in which it identifies 70 near-shore sites that are of national importance for breeding seabirds and worthy of protection as Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs).

If the new Bill, once enacted, enables a network of MCZs to be established then it could have far-reaching consequences for the long-term future of not just seabirds but of all forms of marine life.

Another function of the Bill is to declare a “right to roam” around the whole of the English coastline with the exception of some railway lines and MOD sites. The National Trust has welcomed this as a means of improving access by all to what is a “highly prized Public asset”. Private individuals who own parts of the coastline, and the likes of golf course committees, are likely to be less enthusiastic, with talk of big drops in the retail value of some properties should the idea go ahead.

My own feeling on the matter is that it could be a wonderful opportunity to see parts of our country that have previously been off limits but I worry that us humans are just too irresponsible to be trusted with the privilege. Think litter, erosion, malicious damage to fences and styles, noise pollution, gates left open, and you might be able to imagine my concerns.

The saving grace I suppose is that many of the newly opened up areas will be relatively remote and thus sufficiently far away from the car parks and ice cream vans such that only the most dedicated of ramblers will want to access them.

One hopes that the more intrepid will be all too aware of the need to conserve what they see and not despoil it.

The future of CPD?

THE BVA launched a pilot of VETS.TV at the BSAVA congress. This is an internet television site run jointly by the BVA and Ten Alps Publishing which will be available via a microsite of www.bva.co.uk.

The pilot includes custom-made videos on MRSA, litigation and stress management, a series of interviews with key veterinary figures and a number of specially acquired programmes.

The BVA president, Nick Blayney, says he believes that VETS.TV represents the future of CPD “It will become a significant and popular medium for the profession since it offers varied and interesting programming covering CPD sessions, information on broad general interest and practice-related subjects. It will be up-to-date, forward thinking and an information packed service designed specifically for the veterinary professional”.

Nursing day at ESFM

THE European Society of Feline Medicine (ESFM) congress is to be held in Edinburgh in September.

It will include, for the first time, a feline nursing programme. This will be on Saturday 27th September at the Sheraton Hotel. Sponsored by Hill’s Pet Nutrition and Ceva, the theme for the day will be Making yours a cat friendly practice.

On Saturday evening, there will be a “Golden Party” to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the ESFM’s founder, the FAB, at The Hub, home of Edinburgh’s International Festival, sponsored by Schering-Plough.

To register, see www.fabcats.org or call 0870 742 2278.

CPD

BVNA in Scotland

THE British Veterinary Nursing Association (BVNA) is organising a day of CPD training for its members in Scotland on Saturday 14th June at the Quality Inn in Edinburgh.

Attendance will qualify nurses for six CPD hours.

Sarah Heath, Paul Crawford and Chris Bradley will speak on topics such as “behaviour issues”, “analgesia” and “diabetes management”.

Further details are available from the BVNA office or on www.bvna.co.uk.

APBC courses

THE Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors is to run a series of one-day seminars for veterinary surgeons and nurses. All the events will be held at the Henley Golf and Country Club in Warwickshire.

Subjects, speakers and dates are:

Canine aggression – handling the biting dog with Robin Walker on 23rd May;

Focusing on felines with Sarah Heath on 13th June; Dealing with the firework challenge with Sarah Heath on 12th September; Practical solutions for puppy problems with Gwen Bailey and Claire Arrowsmith on 3rd October.

Details can be found at www.apbc.org.uk.

FAB day in May

FELINE respiratory disease is the theme of the Feline Advisory Bureau Study Day to be held on Friday 9th May at the Royal (Dick) Hospital for Small Animals at Easter Bush.

Information on the new highly pathogenic feline calicivirus strains will be presented by Dr Danielle Gunn-Moore, professor in Feline Medicine at the Dick Vet. She will also discuss the treatment of chronic bronchopulmonary disease.

Other speakers will be Dr Kerry Simpson, Anita Schwartz and Vicky Halls.

Cost of attending is £40. For details see the website www.fabcats.org/conferences/edinburgh08 or e-mail conferences@fabcats.org.
AMITE MORE EFFECTIVE

Indorex

Easy, long-lasting household flea control

Kills fleas and house dust mites
Protects your home for a full 12 months

Further Information from:
Virbac Ltd, Woolpit Business Park, Windmill Avenue, Woolpit, Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk, IP30 9UP.
Tel: 01359 243243 www.virbac.co.uk

Passionate about Animal Health
Suicide and the veterinary profession

VETS, doctors and dentists have a suicide rate around four times higher than that of the population in general. So why do so many of us choose to kill ourselves?

There is a point where the pain becomes too much, where the black hole of depression turns into an unclimbable barricade. It feels as if everything hurts, there is no relief.

It’s time for “Stop the world, I want to get off!” but in reality the world will continue to turn with or without me. It is not responding to my needs and is oblivious to my existence. So, in eliminating myself it will stop my bad feelings and stop them forever. I need suffer no more.

But then, at what price? In ceasing to be Marion McCullagh I will be 60kg of clinical waste. I’ll ruin my kids by leaving them a bad example and a burden of grief. My friends will be sad. I won’t see the horse again and who will look after the dog?

For me, so far, reality has kicked in. I’ll phone someone, walk the dog, go for a ride. Throw some excitement at me and I’m happy to rush back into the arena and continue the struggle. The depression gets pushed away again as soon as I am sufficiently involved.

Fun, doing something with good friends, physical or mental stimulus can provide a way out of the bad feelings. Perhaps it is because I am so used to dealing with other people’s problems in the clinical area, so used to timetables, appointments, highly-structured days at work, that I simply cannot switch off and do without them when I have some free time. Like Winston Churchill’s black dog, my depression stays faithfully at heel and moves in whenever it sees an opportunity.

The veterinary profession is well regarded by society. It takes a sparkling school career to gain entry to veterinary undergraduate training. Vets are seen as compassionate, intelligent and effective. Sometimes I think that vets choose their part of medicine because they prefer animals to people.

The pleasure of having a “hands-on” occupation that deals with problems in the flesh rather than always via e-mail may be undermined by an inherent shyness.

Nick Blayney, the current BVA president, said, “I think vets lead a very lonely life professionally. They don’t get stimulation or new ideas from outside unless they seek them.” The daily routine in practice can be isolating, frustrating or boring and support from management and colleagues may not be enough to balance the stress.

One of the things under-emphasised in training is the very high exposure to clients’ grief. Vets are trained to prevent animal suffering and to preserve the function of the animal. Doctors also relieve suffering but are obliged to preserve life to the bitter end.

To a farmer, death can be the end point of production. If it comes too early and is a financial loss, he may express anger, disappointment and a degree of grief but he survives by acceptance and optimism and by moving on to the next task.

Pet owners have a negative view of death and many of them are very bad at accepting that life has a finite time span. We live in an era where sex in all its variety is acceptable but death is taboo.

**Compasion is central**

Small animal practitioners are expected to kill an animal in the most comfortable way possible. Providing compassion for animals is central to our ethic and we are well trained for it but we find ourselves obliged to extend our skill and compassion to deeply grieving owners on a very regular basis.

We are not trained as counsellors and extending so much sympathy so often can erode the detachment and resilience that is necessary to enjoy life as a practising veterinary surgeon. Counsellors have a strong support system. The grief that they pick up from their clients is dissipated by supervision where they can discuss their case load and gain perspective.

Too much euthanasia wears out a vet, and the more caring the individual the more susceptible he or she will be to the emotional distress which feeds into depression with the potential for suicide.

Performing euthanasia can be regarded as part of anaesthesia, but it is a loss to the veterinary surgeon as well as to the owner. Very often there is an emotional bond between the vet and the animal. I might have vaccinated the dog for 15 years, or seen the horse through the triumphs and disasters of competition.

Euthanising an animal can leave the practitioner with a personal burden of negative emotions as well as those brought on by mopping up the client’s feelings, which are often complex; the sadness can be embelished with anger, guilt or doubt.

So is this what prompted the equine practitioner to shoot himself in his kitchen and the small animal specialist to set himself up an intravenous drip of Phenobarbitosal? Is it because we keep animals only as long as they are functional? When they cannot produce a calf or jump big fences or keep us company without soiling the furniture we dispose of them.

“I don’t want him to suffer” is a good wish but do veterinary surgeons apply it to themselves? Does euthanasia get distorted into untimely suicide and what can the profession do to stop this happening?

It seems that there is a niche for setting up an easily accessible support system of debriefing within practices, especially small animal practices where euthanasia is so frequent and sentiment flows so freely. Veterinary surgeons take on every bit as much emotional pressure as human counsellors and do not have the benefit of formal emotional support.

Prevention is better than cure so perhaps it is time for us to take as good care of ourselves as we do of our patients.

**Sources of help...**

- **VET HELPLINE**
  telephone 07659 811118
  A 24-hour rapid response answerphone service for discussion of problems with someone who has experience of the veterinary profession

- **VETERINARY SURGEONS’ HEALTH SUPPORT PROGRAMME**
  telephone 07946 634220
  Confidential treatment and advice on mental health and addictive issues such as alcohol, drugs and eating disorders

- **VETLIFE**
  website [www.vetlife.org.uk](http://www.vetlife.org.uk)
  A website run by the Veterinary Benevolent Fund to provide information on the support available to anyone in the veterinary profession

- **THE SAMARITANS**
  telephone 08457 90 90 90
  Emotional support helpline for anyone in a crisis
What are the possible causes?

FEW of us can have been in practice for very long before hearing from a child that his or her aspiration is to become a veterinary surgeon, or the lament from an adult, with justifications and excuses, why a similar ambition was thwarted.

Why, then, does a profession, the envy of so many, have such a high incidence of suicide among those who have achieved their objective? Could it be that there is an emotional and philosophical chasm between the expectations of life in the profession and the reality?

Our founding fathers, fired with the Enlightenment, had unashamedly anthropocentric objectives. Domestic animals were considered commodities by society to be used and abused as it thought fit.

This position would have been influenced or granted credence by the biblical statement that humans were given dominion over animals. Social practice has adversely modified the profession’s approach to animal welfare, seek solace in drugs, alcohol or death, the inconsistencies, incongruities and contradictions inherent in our profession’s philosophy should be forcibly explained to prospective students.

The problem is that the profession’s politicians appear oblivious to our confusing and conflicting levels. Those associated with agricultural and laboratory animals have a strictly anthropocentric perspective.

For them, animals remain a commodity, tools of human society that justifies the abuse and torment to which we subject them. They, presumably, justify their indifference to the cruelty involved because they consider our species to have overwhelming prerogative.

Conversely, members ministering to pet animals are required to adopt a totally different attitude. Pet owners, with varying degrees of concern, expect us to consider their animals’ lives sacrosanct. Many demand standards of medical treatment equal to that enjoyed by human beings.

This conflict with unworthy acts and manipulations that are the very antithesis of concern for animal welfare. Thus, pets are selectively bred, even genetically mangled, to produce conformations that ensure life-long discomfort and disability.

Many are socially isolated and sexually mutilated to ensure that the unfortunate creatures comply with the ludicrous demands of owners who have the need for an animated teddy.

Any veterinary surgeon with the intellectual ability to penetrate the crust of complacency that conceals our profession’s approach to animal welfare will be forced to contemplate the inadequacies of the status quo.

How, then, do new graduates accommodate to these obvious anomalies? Those of us who spent our early years in mixed practice accepted that all animals were equal but some were more equal than others. We simply switched philosophy from farm to the small animal consulting table.

Any farm animal not pulling its economic weight was “sent in” while the ageing, decrepit Pekingese in terminal decline was subjected to expensive, life-prolonging medication. We accepted our subservient role to the fatuous demands of society. Who knows what damage was done to us?

Today, when fewer graduates are selected from traditional backgrounds, I suspect that some find the incongruities inherent in our professional philosophy difficult to accept. Of course, many do accommodate.

Those with agricultural interests – a declining group – have no difficulties. Those in the equine branch seem oblivious to the welfare of the horse. While its practical value for transportation and war have diminished, it remains an adjunct to human playtime, to be discarded when age or injury impose functional inadequacy.

In small animals work, some, indifferent to the fundamentals of animal welfare, seek solace in the technologies of their calling. Thus, we see specialisation burgeoning.

Technocrats, unable to see the welfare wood for the trees that enhance their kudos, plunge headlong into scientific medicine, its associated electronic contraptions and surgical techniques of questionable value.

Several options

The real victims, those who have genuine empathy with animals, who do not see them as living gadgets subservient to human aspirations, have several options.

Some leave the profession; those with incisive minds, as students. Some adjust their horizons and degrade their moral concerns to comply with the profession’s limited expectations. A few, unable to cope, commit suicide.

If we are to reduce the number of disenfranchised members who seek solace in drugs, alcohol or death, the inconsistencies, incongruities and contradictions inherent in our profession’s philosophy should be forcibly explained to prospective students.

First place where both dogs and people can donate blood

BEECHWOOD Veterinary Hospital in Doncaster has become the first place in the country where both dogs and people can give blood, after teaming up with the National Blood Service (NBS) and Pet Blood Bank UK (PBBuk). Mark Straw, veterinary surgeon and associate director, said: “I’m a regular blood donor and know how important it is to give. I thought it would be great if I could do it at work. Luckily enough so did the other staff and the owners of our patients. I am proud that Beechwood is now a people and pets lifesaver.”

Those of us who spent our early years in mixed practice accepted that all animals were equal but some were more equal than others. We simply switched philosophy from farm to the small animal consulting table.
Getting to grips with parasites

ENDOPARASITES

Environmental burden of Toxoplasma gondii cysts in cat faeces

Haydee Dabritz and others, University of California, Davis

Toxoplasma gondii is a ubiquitous protozoan parasite that infects 30-40% of the world’s human population. One of the main routes of human infection is contact with contaminated cat faeces. The authors assess the analytical sensitivity of methods for detecting Toxoplasma oocysts and the environmental load resulting from shedding by owned and feral cats.

Faecal samples were taken from 326 cats in the Morro Bay region of California. On the basis of the estimated tonnage of cat faeces deposited outdoors in this area, they estimate the annual burden in the environment to be between 94 and 4,671 oocysts per m².

Despite the low prevalence and short duration of oocyst shedding by cats in this and other surveys, they state that the sheer numbers of oocysts shed by cats during initial infection could lead to substantial environmental contamination.

Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association 221 (11): 1,676-1,684.

Problems in diagnosing tapeworm infections in horses

John Abbott, Oakham Veterinary Hospital, Rutland

The prevalence of the tapeworm Anoplocephala perfoliata in different equine populations has been reported to vary between 20 and 80%. Much of this variation can be attributed to the difficulties in diagnosing tapeworm infections in this species. Abattoir studies tend to demonstrate a much higher prevalence than standard methods for detecting tapeworm eggs in equine faeces. The author examines both the benefits and limitations of an ELISA-based method and describes its application as a monitoring tool.


Interpretation of serum antibody response to Anoplocephala perfoliata

L. N. Kjaer and others, University of Copenhagen, Denmark

Anoplocephala perfoliata is the most common equine tapeworm and high levels of infection have been associated with cases of intestinal intussusception, perforation and peritonitis. The authors compared the response to an A. perfoliata specific ELISA test with the findings of faecal egg counts and post mortem examination of 84 horses. Antibody levels correlated significantly with the intensity of infection despite substantial individual variation. They suggest a cut-off point for this test to indicate horses needing anthelmintic treatment.


Feral hookworm infection in a North American dog

Chris Wojnarowicz, Prairie Diagnostic Services, Saskatoon, Canada

Positive faecal test results were obtained in a variety of species and environments. The authors examined faeces from dogs and cats in the Morro Bay region of California. They found a high prevalence of Ancylostoma caninum, a feral hookworm in cats, and a lower prevalence of Ancylostoma tubaeforme, a feral hookworm in dogs. The authors recommend further research on the prevalence of these parasites in other regions of the world.

Canadian Veterinary Journal 48 (11): 1,185-1,186.

Evidence of direct transmission of Babesia gibsoni in dogs

R. Jefferies and others, Murdoch University, Western Australia

Babesia gibsoni is a protozoan parasite infecting the erythrocytes of domestic and wild dogs, causing fever, haemolytic anaemia, thrombocytopenia, splenomegaly and sometimes death. It can be transmitted by several species of tick but there have been some cases of apparent dog to dog transmission. Often these involved dogs of fighting breeds and it has been suggested that blood transfer during fights may be the transmission route. The authors found 14 dogs positive for this parasite, all of which were American pit bull terriers.


Prevalence of Campylobacter and four intestinal parasites in Hearing Dogs

C. M. Guest and others, Hearing Dogs for Deaf People, Princess Risborough, Bucks.

There is little current information on the prevalence of gastrointestinal parasites in the UK dog population. Many canine parasites are potential zoonotic pathogens and their control is particularly important in Hearing Dogs which are often owned by people who may be vulnerable to infection because of age or a compromised immune system. The authors examined faeces from dogs associated with the charity. Levels of Campylobacter infection were as high as 31% but the prevalence of other endoparasites was much lower.


Trichostrongylus and Haemonchus infections in low bodyweight lambs

S. J. McClure and D. L. Emery, CSIRO, Armidale, New South Wales

During trials of a new anthelmintic vaccine in lambs a correlation was established between bodyweight and variation in worm counts. The authors report further observations on the effect of bodyweight on protection and vaccine response in lambs in the control groups for these trials. They found that merino lambs weighing less than 23 kg at the time of first exposure to Trichostrongylus colubriformis and Haemonchus contortus had an impaired ability to develop protective mucosal immunity and to resist parasite challenge.


ECTOPARASITES

Clinical effects and outcome of feline permethrin spot-on poisonings reported to the Veterinary Poisons Information Service (VPIS), London

Nicholas Sutton and others, Veterinary Poisons Information Service

Permethrin is a pyrethroid insecticide used in topical (spot-on) flea treatments for dogs. These products are contraindicated in cats because of a high risk of toxicosis but there have been many reports of owners ignoring or not noticing warnings on the product packaging.

The authors describe the findings in 286 cases of inappropriate use in cats reported by veterinary practitioners to the Veterinary Poisons Information Service in London. In 96.9% of these cases, the cats showed clinical signs, with increased muscle activity (twitching, tremor, fasciculations or convulsions) occurring in 88% of cases.

The duration of this muscle activity was long, with convulsions lasting for an average of 39 hours and tremors for 32 hours. Recovery typically occurred within two to three days but in some cases it took up to seven days. In 10.5% of cases the affected cat died.


Efficacy of an imidacloprid/permethrin product against rabbit ectoparasites

Olaf Hansen and others, Bayer Healthcare, Leverkusen, Germany

Advantis (Bayer) is a spot-on formulation containing imidacloprid and permethrin licensed for the treatment and prevention of flea infestations in dogs. The authors evaluate its use in the treatment of flea (Ctenocephalides felis) and mite (Cheyletiella parasitivorax and Listrophorus gibbus) infestations in rabbits. Rabbits received 40 mg imidacloprid and 200 mg permethrin and were evaluated at intervals over the next six weeks. From two weeks after treatment no fleas or mites were detected. No adverse reactions were recorded.


Prevalence of Rickettsia felis DNA in the blood of cats and their fleas

Jennifer Hawley and others, Colorado State University

Rickettsia felis is one of a group of arthropod borne rickettsial parasites responsible for the spotted fever conditions in humans, characterised by fever, headache, myalgia and macular rash. In many parts of the world it has been associated with the cat flea (Ctenocephalides felis). The authors used...
PCR analyses to detect *R. felis* DNA in cats and their fleas in three US states, using the bacterial citrate synthase gene and the outer membrane protein B gene. Overall, 67% of the 92 flea samples but none from the host cats were positive.


Review of tick toxicity in Australian cats linked to *Ixodes* species

Daniel Schull and others, University of Queensland

Tick toxicity in cats is a common condition along the eastern coast of Australia and is usually linked with exposure to *Ixodes holocyclus*. Typical clinical signs include a flaccid ascending neuromuscular paralysis, anxiety, dysphonia, hind limb weakness, papillary dilation and respiratory signs. Mainstays of treatment are tick removal, antitoxin serum and intensive supportive care. With prompt and appropriate management, the prognosis is good but the authors warn that most of the literature on tick toxicity is highly anecdotal in nature.


Advances in the control of ticks in small animal practice

Anke Hendricks and Natalie Perrins, Royal Veterinary College

Although ticks can be a cause of significant disease in small animals, in the UK tick control has often been considered an added bonus of using flea control products. However, due to an increasing mobility of pets since the relaxation of quarantine controls and a growing awareness of the dangers of tick-borne disease, there is a realisation of the need for better tick control. There are now specific products licensed for use in cats and dogs and the authors explain the principles behind the implementation of a control programme.

In Practice 29 (5): 284-287.

Selamectin in the treatment of psoroptic and sarcoptic mange in rabbits

Arif Kurtcede and others, Ankara University, Turkey

*Psoroptes cuniculi* and *Sarcoptes scabiei* are common ectoparasites of rabbits, with the former causing alopecia and dermatitis and the latter responsible for severe dermatitis and otitis. The authors assessed the efficacy of selamectin against these parasites. Groups of New Zealand and Angora rabbits were given a minimum dose of 6mg/kg bodyweight and examined regularly over the next eight weeks. Treated rabbits were found to have significantly fewer mites on skin scraping or otoscopy than those given vehicle alone.


Diagnosis of *Malassezia* otitis externa in the dog

J. S. Griffin and others, Cornell University, New York

Otitis externa is the most common disorder of the canine external ear canal, causing inflammation of ear canal, with or without infection. The yeast *Malassezia pachydermatis* is involved in an estimated 57% of all infections. The authors examined the effect of heat-fixing otic exudate on subsequent cytological analysis. Exudate collected on cotton swabs was rolled on to glass slides and heat fixed before staining. It was found that there was no difference in the yeast numbers counted on treated and non-treated slides.


**PUPAE-CONTROLLING BREAKTHROUGH**

**NON-INSECTICIDAL SKOOSH™**

- Controls ALL stages of the life cycle, INCLUDING PUPAE
- INSTANTLY stops adult fleas from biting
- Contains NO INSECTICIDES and is safe for humans and pets

SKOOSH™, the only complete and safe answer to environmental flea control

For further information visit the Skoosh™ website or alternatively call the Customer Support Team on 01494 781510.

www.skooshthefleas.com

CEVA Animal Health Ltd.
90 The Broadway, Chesham, Buckinghamshire HP5 1EG.
Telephone: 01494 781510
Facing up to the challenges

ROWING would seem to be an ideal pastime for anyone preparing for a working life as a historian, less so as a research scientist and academic administrator. But the one sport in which participants spend their whole time looking backwards did help to launch the career of Quintin McKellar, principal of the Royal Veterinary College.

After growing up on the family sheep farm in Renfrewshire, Professor McKellar might have been expected to take up a position in large animal practice on graduating from the Glasgow veterinary school in 1981. Instead, he applied and was accepted for a PhD researching the biology of the bovine gut nematode Ostertagia ostertagi.

“I’d like to be able to give a different reason, but my main motivation for staying on was to continue as a member of the university rowing club, which I was deeply involved with at the time,” he explains.

Although his rationale for entering academia may have been idiosyncratic, Quintin found he was well suited to the role of a veterinary researcher. So on completing his PhD in 1984 he was offered a job in the department of pharmacology, working on parasite responses to anthelmintics. And it wasn’t long before he was required to test his skills as an administrator when, following the tragic death of Jim Bogan in 1988, he took over as head of a research group.

“Bogan in 1988, he took over as head following the tragic death of Jim Bogan and wasn’t long before he was required to test his skills as an administrator when, following the tragic death of Jim Bogan in 1988, he took over as head of a research group.”

This emphasis on developing the Hawkeshead site prompted a long debate on the future of the college’s original home in Camden Town. But, he says, the college authorities have now decided to retain the old buildings as the base for its pre-clinical veterinary students and for undergraduates on its veterinary science course.

“There are many reasons why we have chosen to stay there but the main one is the benefits for students of being in central London – the social and cultural aspects that they would miss out on if they had to spend all their time at the one campus.”

While recognising the need to support its research and clinical services work, the college has to remember its principal responsibility is to its students. So another major investment went into the LIVE building at Hawkeshead which officially opened in February 2007.

That provides the facilities for undergraduates to carry out the sort of independent problem-based learning needed by today’s undergraduates and which is hoped will equip them with the ability to continue expanding their clinical skills throughout their careers.

The new centre also helps those responsible for directing this teaching. “If you are trying to assess students who will be going out into a practice environment, then asking them to write essays is probably not the best way of going about it,” he notes.

Like the other UK veterinary schools, the RVC is reviewing the content of its undergraduate course to cope with the explosion in knowledge in the biological sciences. This process has been given added impetus by the opening of the new school in Nottingham, which had the luxury of designing its curriculum from scratch.

“Having another competitor on the scene has made us all sharpen our focus but it is reassuring to find that many of the teaching methodologies being used at the new school are essentially those that we have pioneered.”

Professor McKellar believes the emergence of a new school may also accelerate moves towards a more diverse approach at the different schools. “Within the constraints of the RCVS guidelines, I think the schools will head down the route towards some level of specialisation in their courses. Students will be tracked more robustly than in the past towards an interest in a particular species or clinical discipline. But hopefully we will still produce graduates with the potential to go into any branch of the profession.”

Wherever they decide to make their careers, one inescapable fact about the next generation of veterinary graduates is their gender. Nearly 90% of the current intake at the RVC is female but Prof. McKellar says that this imbalance reflects the numbers of students applying to the course and rejects any return to an entry system for its pre-clinical veterinary students.

A positive trend

He insists that the feminisation of the veterinary profession is largely a positive trend. Any resulting problems, such as the need to provide career breaks for childcare, are ones that should be addressed by the veterinary profession as a whole, and not just the school admissions tutors.

An aspect of the undergraduate intake that he believes the schools should address is their social mix – one that is increasingly white, middle class.

The RVC is now in the second year of a one-year foundation programme allowing students from disadvantaged backgrounds to compete for a place on the course on an equal footing.

This programme is supported by generous bursaries and every one of the 30 students on the first course has been accepted at the RVC or another UK school and they are performing extremely well, he says.

But the schools should not be dropping their academic standards in an effort to attract the more practically-minded students that many practitioners claim would be better suited than the current high-flyers to life in practice.

“My old gran used to say that if someone wasn’t any good at maths, it was all right because they would be good at woodwork. Sadly, that isn’t true because life isn’t fair. The people with the best academic skills are, more often than not, the same ones who have the best practical and social skills, so they are bound to disentangle them just as fast.”

He does, however, have more sympathy for that other perennial complaint made by older practitioners about new graduates: their lack of business skills should be learned before graduates begin life in practice.

“Yes, it is our responsibility and we have let them down.” So the RVC is considering the possibility of business studies electives for undergraduates and is also looking at offering postgraduate courses to both its own students and those from other schools.

In deciding the future direction of veterinary education in the UK, the schools will have to work within the framework of the existing legislation as there is little prospect of a replacement for the 1966 Veterinary Surgeons Act.

Prof. McKellar insists that there is plenty of scope within the existing rules to make positive changes to the British system. “My goal is to help in providing veterinary education that is second to none. If you ask most people which country provides the best system they would say the US. I want ours to be the best on offer: that isn’t pie-in-the-sky, I really think it can be achieved.”

Planning how to get there is another matter. But to meet the challenge, Prof. McKellar is making an early start, as he does every day. His daily routine involves getting up at 6am and spending half-an-hour on the rowing machine set up in his garage.

“On cold winter mornings I open the doors and stare out into the darkness while I row. I find that really relaxing.”

JOHN BONNER meets the principal of the RVC
KRUUSE advert
Furniture store transformed into pioneer hospital’s referral centre

IN the north-west of England, one of the longest established veterinary hospitals in the country is continuing to lead the field, setting up a new multi-disciplinary referral centre.

The name of the Rutland House Veterinary Hospital in St Helens, Merseyside, is well-known in the profession; for many decades it has been in the forefront of practice and has produced some of the profession’s best-known names. The current partners are orthopods Ian Barclay and Duncan Midgley and dermatologist Sue Paterson.

The partners realised that they had reached the limit of expansion in their existing location but were keen to develop the business and expand their referral caseload.

The answer was found in a redundant furniture store four miles away which they have developed into a multi-disciplinary referral centre, leaving the original site as a first opinion veterinary hospital.

Tremendous freedom

The new building was acquired as a shell with little internal structure, allowing tremendous freedom for the layout that the partners could design. I asked who their architect was, but practice manager Janie Clare replied that she and the three partners had designed it themselves. They had met architects initially but had found them unsatisfactory, failing to grasp the issues of working with animals in a healthcare setting. The end result, opened last October, is a very attractive building and a comfortable and functional working environment.

The waiting room is large and bright, and its L-shape allows separation of cats and dogs, resulting in fewer stressed or excited patients. The eight consulting rooms are each large enough to accommodate family groups that often arrive with referral patients, and one is windowless for the ophthalmologists.

Another room opens into the entrance lobby rather than directly off the waiting room and will become a condolence room. Two consulting rooms are used primarily by the dermatologists who, in addition to their busy skin caseload, have a particular interest in ear cases. These back onto a treatment room fitted with two work-tables (one of which is a tub-table for flushing ears), a bank of cages for day-patients and a laboratory. This area also houses a CO2 laser, a BAER machine for hearing tests and a video otoscopy set-up, which gives excellent visualisation of the depths of the ear canal and makes diagnosis and thorough cleaning far easier.

Large meeting room

Also on the ground floor is a two-bedroom flat and a 60-seat meeting room. This is used for internal CPD, for regular meetings for referring practices and for breeder groups, and is made available without charge to any local group which wishes to make use of it.

The floor plan allows the dog waiting area to be used as additional meeting space, for example to run parallel vet and nurse sessions, or as a catering area for meetings held in the main room. The separate cat waiting area ensures that the practice can still operate around such use.

The kennels and operating suites are upstairs, accessed by a lift. The wards are deliberately kept small, reducing noise, aiding infection control and helping to keep patients relaxed. There are four dog wards, one

CHRISTINE SHIELD takes a close look at a north-west practice’s latest development

The new premises and (below) head of surgery Prue Neath with orthopaedic surgeon Duncan Midgley.

RUTLAND HOUSE VETERINARY HOSPITAL – HISTORY

- Established in 1961 by John Tandy and Ian Hughes
- Became one of Britain’s earliest veterinary hospitals in the late 1960s
- John Tandy was instrumental in the establishment of the British Veterinary Hospitals Association in 1972 and was elected as the founder president
- New partners Christine Morton (now McGrath) and Ian Barclay bought into the practice in 1988: two years later John and Ian retired
- Christine Morton left the practice to pursue other interests in 1999
- Duncan Midgley joined the partnership in 1998
- Sue Paterson joined the partnership in 2003
furnished with walk-in kennels for large or long-stay patients, and one for cats. Ellie Mardell, head of the feline medicine service, specified the cat kennels very carefully, including a resting shelf in each, and although none of the in-patients was using the shelf when I visited, they did all seem extraordinarily relaxed, lying on their sides and backs rather than warily upright.

Strict hygiene
Prue Neath, newly appointed head of surgery, has instituted strict hygiene controls. People are only allowed into the surgical suite in scrubs and clogs, or with outdoor clothes covered with a Tyvek suit together with hat and shoe-covers.

The prep room is particularly spacious, with five tub tables along one wall and the five operating theatres along the other wall, interspersed with scrub sinks. There is also a busy minor procedures room with ultrasound facilities, although the well-equipped endoscopy suite, which is primarily used by the internal medicine specialist Rebecca Littler for gastro-enterology cases, is downstairs to avoid any aerosol contamination of theatres.

The third floor is occupied by spacious offices for the veterinary consultants so they have a quiet area for report writing and phoning clients and referring veterinary surgeons.

New services
Currently the practice offers referrals in canine and feline medicine, dermatology, ophthalmology, soft tissue surgery and orthopaedic surgery.

Plans for the future include the addition of a cardiology service by the end of the year, and after that an oncology service to complement the existing disciplines. A CT scanner is scheduled for installation in June as an addition to the mobile MRI scanner which visits twice monthly.

It is good to see that such a well-known and long-established practice is not resting on its laurels but continuing to set the trends within the profession.

One or more of these clinical signs can point to gastric ulcers in performance and leisure horses – racehorses aren’t the only sufferers.

Following confirmation by endoscopy, GastroGard™ provides an effective, well-tolerated treatment for this serious condition – something that no change in feed or stabling alone can do.

What’s more, a preventative dose of GastroGard is proven to keep gastric ulcers away.

Don’t let any horse suffer in silence – when you see the signs of gastric ulcers, think gastric ulcer.
Raising awareness of gastric ulcers

The National Water Sports Centre, Holme Pierrepoint, Nottingham, on 7th May. For details contact Bev Archer at Merial on 01279 775862 or e-mail beverley.archer@merial.com.

There is also a BEVA CPD training event sponsored by Merial and EV Veterinary Products to be held at Willesley Equine on 15th and 16th May.

The course is suitable for all levels of veterinarians in general and specialist equine practice. Each delegate will attend for one of the practical days and all will attend the lecture evening on 15th May.

The main aim of this course is to teach effective gastroscopy via direct hands-on small group instruction. It is suitable for RCVS Module C-E 1 Gastrointestinal disease and intensive care.

The speakers are Richard Hepburn and Dr Tim Brazil of Equine Medicine On The Move; the tutors will be Emma Mitchell, temporary lecturer in equine medicine at the RVC, and Rachel Conwell of Minster Equine Veterinary Clinic.

For details of this event contact BEVA on 01638 723 555 or visit www.beva.org.uk.

Differences

On the preview day, following a tour of the hospital, Andy Durham, an RCVS specialist in equine internal medicine, gave a presentation on gastric ulceration.

Mr Durham explained that there are fundamental differences in human and equine ulcers. The equine condition is, in most cases, brought on by exposure to acid in the squamous mucosa in the upper half of the stomach; whereas the human stomach is completely lined by acid in the squamous fundus. A high proportion of gastric ulcers can be found in the area of the margo plicatus.

In addition to this, humans only secrete acid into the stomach when they eat, whereas horses are designed to be constant trickle feeders, releasing acid into the stomach constantly regardless of whether or not they are eating.

In natural conditions, the horse will have a constant flow of food filling the lower, protected part of the stomach. However, with modern stabilising and exercise, the vulnerable top part of the horse's stomach can become exposed to acid.

A regular and constant intake of forage will help absorb the acid, whereas a high cereal intake within a low forage diet will make the stomach content very fluid. During exercise, pressure from the abdomen compresses the stomach, which in turn pushes the fluid level to the squamous mucosa.

Finally, Mr Durham discussed the signs of gastric ulcers. They will generally cause low-grade pain, which means that signs are often vague. In addition, tolerance of ulcers will also vary from one horse to another. The signs are: poor performance, picky appetite, mild weight loss, starey coat, colic, discomfort on girth tightening and, in foals, salivation and teeth grinding.

Dr Emma Batson of Merial went on to talk about risk factors, diagnosis, treatment and management for prevention.

Dr Batson demonstrated through clinical trials that during 24 hours feed deprivation, the acidity in the horse's stomach falls to pH 2.0 or less for 76% of the time. She also noted that it's worth remembering that the acid secreted into the stomach is 200 times stronger than vinegar.

Trials have shown that in a horse that has beenstarved for a few hours, exercise will have a more detrimental effect on ulcers than a horse that has been on ad lib forage.

The less full the stomach (or more “fluid” if fed cereals), the exercise will mean that more acid will come into contact with the vulnerable top part of the stomach.

In contrast, a horse that has had constant access to forage, the stomach contents will form a mat-like barrier, protecting the upper part of the stomach. Other risk factors for gastric ulcers include stable confinement, transportation and anaesthesia.

GastroGard (omeprazole) is the only licensed treatment for gastric ulcers in the UK, Dr Batson said. Following treatment, however, it is important that, where possible, management changes are put in place, otherwise the ulcers may well return. These include access to ad lib hay or forage, turnout and, where possible, only small quantities of cereals. Exercise or training on an empty stomach should be avoided.

For those horses where the risk factors remain high – due to the training regime for example – Dr Batson explained that trials have shown that an on-going preventive dose of omeprazole at 1mg/kg will help prevent ulcers from returning.

Concluding with a series of case studies demonstrating where ulcers have been identified, diagnosed and treated, Dr Batson said that, in some cases, the horses have made quite dramatic responses.

The vague signs associated with gastric ulcers, however, mean that in some horses the causes can be multifactorial and so further
National database to help control incidence of disease in horses

HORSE owners and their veterinary advisers have been given a powerful tool for controlling the incidence of disease in the UK equine population.

At the National Equine Forum in London on 27th March, Graham Suggett, director of equine development at the British Equestrian Federation, announced the completion of the second phase of the National Equine Database.

This provides a single source of information on the whole of the country’s horse population and is “a truly world-beating resource”, he said.

Set up with DEFRA funding to monitor the equine passport system, for two years the database has been gathering data supplied by breed societies and other passport issuing organisations (PIOs) on more than 1.15 million horses.

After overcoming problems in software development, the BEF is now able to offer free on-line access to pedigree information on all horses entered in the database with more detailed data available later.

It is hoped this will stimulate both the domestic and export markets for UK horses and it will also provide valuable information for use in disease surveillance and control.

**Disease threats**

Updates on two of the most serious disease threats to the UK’s equine population were given by veterinarians attending the meeting.

Dr Pat Harris of the Waltham Centre for Pet Nutrition delivered a paper on behalf of the RVC’s Professor Josh Slater on the current state of strangles research.

The development of vaccines has been stimulated by the completion in 2006 of the full map of the *Streptococcus equi* genome. By comparing this with the DNA of the closely related but less dangerous organism, *Strep. equisimilis*, researchers have been able to identify genetic markers of virulence, a key step towards the design of an efficient vaccine.

The new knowledge has also helped towards the development of two new diagnostic tests which have been made available by the Animal Health Trust. These technologies are useful in identifying animals with mild or absent clinical signs which play such an important role in disease transmission, she said.

The second infectious condition not yet controlled is African horse sickness, which is a vector-borne disease that has occurred in Europe and parts of Africa.

The research has been further stimulated by the completion in 2006 of the full map of the *Streptococcus equi* genome. By comparing this with the DNA of the closely related but less dangerous organism, *Strep. equisimilis*, researchers have been able to identify genetic markers of virulence, a key step towards the design of an efficient vaccine.

**Investigations**

Dr Suggett said the database would provide objective evidence to link breeding and performance and will allow comparisons between horses competing in different sporting disciplines.

It is hoped this will stimulate both the domestic and export markets for UK horses and it will also provide valuable information for use in disease surveillance and control.

The worst scenario would be an outbreak of AHS in a ‘backstreet’ pony that would probably go unrecognised, allowing the disease to gain a foothold.

The best defence against the threat of similar problems with AHS is vigilance – “the worst scenario would be an outbreak of AHS in a ‘backstreet’ pony that would probably go unrecognised, allowing the disease to gain a foothold,” Suggett said.

Everyone dealing with horses must be aware of the possibility of similar problems with AHS and any suspicion or death or illness must be reported and investigated.

**Infectious conditions**

New data on non-infectious conditions arising from routine husbandry practices were also described at the meeting. Soraya Morscher of the department of life science at the University of Limerick presented the results of a study which won her a competition for the best student thesis in the equine science field: the Eqyalan Duo Equine Thesis of the Year.

She analysed the data on 1,297 foalings over 13 years at a large public stud in County Kildare in an effort to identify factors linked to problems in the perinatal period. She found that about 17% of mares experienced difficulties in delivery, a considerably higher figure than in previous reports.

Meanwhile, the incidence of “red bag presentations” (in which the placenta is expelled prematurely with potentially fatal consequences for the foal) was more than 6.3%, again far higher than the 1% stated in earlier reports.

This condition was more often associated with older mares and an increase in the number of previous deliveries.

Ms Morscher said new information resulting from such work was valuable in monitoring any variation in the incidence of foaling complications that may result from changes in management practices. This was particularly important because of the rapid nature of the birth process in this species – an average of 17 minutes – and the high economic value of thoroughbreds.

“It is imperative to establish early on whether delivery of the foal and events surrounding birth are within normal ranges: any aberration can pose significant risk to the mare and the foal,” she said.

John McEwen, chairman of the veterinary committee of the FEI, presented a paper on the health and welfare challenges for horses at the 2008 Olympics.
Banking: getting the best business deal

WITH the economy looking shaky, every business should be looking to control its costs. But while many businesses are looking at supplies, energy or staff, few are looking at their bank account to save expenses.

They should be. Alliance & Leicester believes businesses are missing out on half a billion pounds a year by failing to look for the best business deposit account. And the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) believes that its 125,000 members are paying £65 million more than they need to in banking fees on their current accounts.

As Steve Jennings, business banking director at A&L, points out, “Businesses must review their finances regularly” – and that includes asking if they’re getting what they need out of their bank, and what they’re paying for it.

It’s certainly possible to get a better deal. Over recent years, the number of banks providing services to business has increased. The Big Four still dominate the high street, but choice has been increased by the entry of Alliance & Leicester, the Co-Operative Bank and Abbey to the business banking sector.

Less progress
The overwhelming majority of businesses, however, still bank with the major high street banks. And there’s been less progress here: despite the Office of Fair Trading telling banks to offer either free business banking or interest on business current accounts, the banks have been dragging their feet. So if you’re with one of the big banks, it may be time to investigate your options.

Some banks are now offering free periods to businesses which switch to the bank, from six to 18 months. Abbey offers “free forever”. Read the small print though – because cash payments, which can be significant for some businesses, are often only free up to a monthly limit.

There may also be a limited number of cheques you can pay in per month before charges start cutting in.

There is no short cut to siting down with a spreadsheet and working out the numbers. The right bank account for one business isn’t necessarily the best for the business next door. Different amounts of cash and cheque payments can make a big difference. For instance, the Royal Bank of Scotland’s Free Automated Transactions Tariff, with no charges for direct debits or standing orders, would be useful for many businesses with a regular stream of subscription or maintenance income. But its high cash handling charges would make it unsuitable for a retailer.

Many of the major banks have more than one business tariff. It’s worth checking that you are on the right one – again, this means sitting down with a spreadsheet, not just looking at the brochure. Like all things in business, saving money on the business bank account requires a little hard work. Any business which generally maintains its account in credit should also consider the effect of interest on its current account. While many accounts still don’t offer any interest on credit balances, others do – and there’s a wide variance in the rates offered. Under £500 will only get a quarter of a per cent interest at many banks, whereas HSBC and Lloyds will pay over 3%.

It’s possible that a cash-rich business with relatively few, large value transactions would get a better deal from an interest bearing current account with bank charges than from a free account which doesn’t pay interest.

There are some good deals available to FSB members (detailed in Table 1). The FSB has an arrangement with the Co-Operative Bank, offering a free account with significant savings over most of the other banks. Other good options are Abbey and Alliance & Leicester, which have set out to attract new business customers and offer excellent terms.

Save hassle
By the way, don’t forget that if you get a good offer from another bank, it may well be worth going to your existing bank and asking whether it can match or beat it. If it can, you’ll save yourself the hassle of switching while saving on bank charges too.

If you’re considering switching to a bank which doesn’t offer a charge-free period, ask if it can sweeten the deal: many bank managers have a limited amount of discretion to use such offers in order to win new business for their branch.

Many of the business banks advertise the quality of their advice and relationships with customers. The question has to be whether you want the bank manager as your adviser – and whether you will get real value out of that relationship.

‘Greatest supporter’
Some businesses claim the bank manager is one of their greatest supporters, and can help find them the right finance to grow the business. If that’s the case, you’re with the right bank. If not, it’s worth considering a switch.

The Big Four banks, of course, offer branch-based business bank accounts. Many business customers prefer to have a branch banking relationship. But if you are happy to work over the internet, there are some good deals available.

Cash handling needn’t be a problem, since many banks use the Post Office network for paying in and offer access to LINK ATMs for taking cash out.

Most banks handle basic transactions correctly and efficiently (if your bank makes mistakes on basic transactions it’s time to switch, however good the deal you’re currently getting!). However, switching an account may involve changing a number of direct debits and other automated arrangements.

It’s easy for these to go wrong, so during the period immediately around a change of bank, be extra vigilant in looking at your statements and ensuring suppliers, customers and employees know they should tell you immediately if there are any problems.

While choosing the right current account is of first importance, choosing the right deposit accounts or debt finance can also be crucial in

**TABLE 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Account Type</th>
<th>Free period</th>
<th>Free cash</th>
<th>Free cheques</th>
<th>Cash credit fee</th>
<th>Cheque credit fee</th>
<th>Interest on credit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abbey Free Day to Day Banking Forever</td>
<td>Permanent</td>
<td>£3,000/£6,000</td>
<td>100 paid in a month, and up to 100 cash and cheque debits a month, free</td>
<td>50p/£100</td>
<td>50p</td>
<td>0.75-2.72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natwest Standard</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Free</td>
<td>£70/£100</td>
<td>3.25%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FSB/Coop Bank</td>
<td>Permanent</td>
<td>Up to £4,000 a month</td>
<td>Free</td>
<td>40p/£100 above £4,000</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Yes – up to 4.49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A&amp;L Free Business Current account</td>
<td>Permanent</td>
<td>£4,000 free per month</td>
<td>Free and unlimited</td>
<td>25p/£100 for NRBN members</td>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barclays Business Tariff</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>55p</td>
<td>28p</td>
<td>3.25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Moneyfacts/BBA business account finder, sole trader accounts.
Simplifying the rota process

AT Veterinary Systems has launched a new product designed to simplify the process of creating and managing staff rotas. Rota Manager is described as the first product of its kind to take on the complex but essential task of veterinary staff management.

Its objectives are to improve staff efficiency; slash the time it takes to produce rotas; make life easier for those charged with producing rotas; reduce the mountains of paper generated by manual rotas; and ensure a rota is immediately available on every computer screen in a practice.

The most recent Management Analysis Indices (MAI) figures produced by AT show wide variations in the total fees earned per vet even in practices charging similar amounts.

The firm says that closer investigation reveals a multitude of causes for this but a significant factor is how staff rotas are managed, indicating that those practices with lower turnover causes for this but a significant factor is how staff rotas are managed, indicating that those practices with lower turnover.

Feedback from the survey; many vets, practice managers and head nurses described staff rota writing as a "chore", "headache", "a nightmare of a job", and "a thankless task".

E-mail marketing service

MC Communications of Durham has joined forces with Constant Contact, a provider of e-mail marketing and online surveys, to help veterinary practices promote their services.

The PR and copywriting consultancy, which specialises in veterinary PR and marketing and whose clients include SPVS, can now provide what it calls "easy-to-use e-mail marketing and online survey products" and "a full service e-marketing service".

Practices can choose either to manage their accounts themselves and design, write and distribute their newsletters in-house, or else opt for a service which will include account management, design, copywriting and distribution.

Principal consultant Marie Carter said that e-mail marketing would be the best solution for practices looking to promote their services by communicating directly with existing and lapsed clients.

For details e-mail enquiries@mccomcommunications.org.uk or call Marie on 0191 373 7830.

Data transfer system launched

A DATA-transfer system, created by a consortium of companies, has been launched.

The firm says that closer investigation reveals a multitude of causes for this but a significant factor is how staff rotas are managed, indicating that those practices with lower turnover.

Feedback from the survey; many vets, practice managers and head nurses described staff rota writing as a "chore", "headache", "a nightmare of a job", and "a thankless task".

Charity trek in China

DOGS for the Disabled's third charity trek, The Great Wall of China Challenge, takes place from 25th April to 4th May next year.

To take part in the challenge, you need to pay a registration fee of £250 and pledge to raise minimum funds of £2,900 for the charity. For further information and an application form telephone the event organiser, Action for Charity, on 0845 408 2698 or e-mail events@actionforcharity.co.uk; details are also on the website, www.actionforcharity.co.uk.

Top accounts

Many come from providers which don't offer current accounts – Kaupthing Singer & Friedlander's Premier Base Rate 90 has the highest rate of interest at 5.5%, according to Moneyfacts, with Bath Building Society and Northern Rock also showing up in the top accounts. For loans, too, businesses can approach banks other than their current account provider.

The credit crunch may make it more difficult to do so, so arm yourself with evidence that your business has stable revenues and profitability.

The credit crunch also means that banks may take a view that certain types of business should pay higher interest rates on their finance – so it will be doubly worth while checking the market to see if you can get a better rate.

Businesses which have usually relied on an overdraft should be aware that rates are often better on fixed debt. Besides, if the economy does worsen, a bank can insist that an overdraft is repayable on demand – potentially putting a firm out of business.

Fix the debt with a term loan, and this risk is removed – though the loan will have to be either paid off, or renewed, at the end of the loan period. Leasing deals can also work out well for businesses that have a large asset base.

Finally, once you've selected your bank (or banks), don't forget to keep tabs on what you're paying. Check your statements: banks can, and do, make mistakes when calculating charges. If there appears to be a discrepancy between what you think you ought to have paid, and the amount on the statement, query it immediately.

Even though you can claim back wrongly applied bank charges for six years, it's much easier to do so immediately.

Banks are not the villains they are often painted. They're businesses trying to make a profit. But that profit could be your margin – so ensure that you are getting a fair deal from your bank. And if you're not, switch!
Some like it hot!

MARILYN Monroe will, forever, be an icon of the establishment. Vivacious, vulnerable and so very venal, her appeal transcended the obvious and appealed to generations across all creeds, classes and conventions.

Yet, when you look at her, it's intriguing that, while none of her features was in itself that beautiful, when seen together, as a person, she was radiantly attractive.

Visual appeal is not just intriguing, it's something that, as a mere male, I imagine I will never properly understand. Thankfully, we're all different from one another which should give me a fighting chance but it does perplex me that when I ask women whom they find attractive, the list ranges from Liam Neeson, Jack Nicholson, Leonardo Di Caprio to Robert de Niro. I mean, how can the female of the species find these guys all so attractive when they're all so different.

Each one, individually, yes, of course I can see the attraction but there's no discernible pattern here, no common thread. I do accept that this will, forever, be one of the gender mysteries that I may never fathom but it does perplex me that when I ask women whom they find attractive, the list ranges from Liam Neeson, Jack Nicholson, Leonardo Di Caprio to Robert de Niro. I mean, how can the female of the species find these guys all so attractive when they're all so different.

Recently I've been driving a Nissan Qashqai and, here too, the sum of the parts far exceeds the individual components.

Thoroughly likeable

Overall, this is a thoroughly likeable car – a fact well recognised by the public who seem to have bought rather a lot of them. Like Ms Monroe, the Qashqai has no individual, exquisite features but the final result is extremely capable and user friendly.

The Qashqai is Nissan's version of a true cross-over vehicle in a rapidly growing market sector and is equally at home in an urban environment as well as a rural one. The press marketing that accompanied the car was keen to point it out as being "100% urbanproof". What this means is a mystery to me. All I know is that the two-wheel-drive version I tested would struggle to bend sheep in the Himalayas, but would excel at driving up slightly muddy driveways whilst dropping the kids to school.

So in today's terms it could be considered an adequate off-roader, which would frankly be more than most people require. Powered by a choice of two petrol and two diesel engines, some of the engines can sound a little coarse, particularly the 1.5dCi as tested (the smaller of the diesels), but all produce acceptable performance and the 2.0dCi might be a better option if you intend to work the car hard whilst expecting reasonable fuel economy.

Over the week I saw a regular return of over 45mpg, which is outstanding for a car of its size and capability. However, any lack of exhilarating performance doesn't really matter. It goes well enough to suit its personality which is both accommodating and, somehow, rather charming.

No one complained!

It's spacious and so easy to live with that I really didn’t want to give it back at the end of the test period. It swallowed trips to B&Q without murmur, digesting great sheets of hardboard and aluminium ladders with ease.

It carried five of us on a day trip in comfort and, rather unusually, no one complained about anything at all.

Legroom front and rear is excellent, the seats are comfortable and supportive, they fold easily, and access to the rear is simple and straightforward. The six-speed gearbox is light and precise and a joy to use.

All in all, the Qashqai was an excellent companion and workhorse all rolled into one. True, the test car, in Acenta trim, came in a dreadful, metallic copper colour with orange and black check upholstery to match but, in a more sober suit of clothes and with leather trim, the Qashqai would be as much at home on the forecourt of the

AT A GLANCE

Nissan Qashqai 1.5dCi Acenta

Price: £17,889 (as tested); £16,399 list price OTR

Power: 106PS

0-62 mph: 12.2 seconds

Top speed: 108mph

Fuel economy: combined 52.3mpg

Insurance group: 14

OVERALL: ++++/5

Dorchester as it would be in the muddy lanes of Borechurch.

Safe, comfortable and capable, this is an excellent family car either in 2wd or 4wd form. Above all, the huge, panoramic glass roof not only looks terrific from outside but allows the interior to be light, airy and somehow rather cheerful.

To be honest, I would have one tomorrow but I'm not sure I'd ever get over the feeling that, one evening, I might find it crooning “Happy Birthday Mr President” from under fluttering eyelashes, and that one day I would wake up to find the CIA taking an unhealthy interest.

Calling veterinary show-jumpers

THE French Association of Veterinary Riders (AFVC) is inviting all veterinary riders to compete in the First World Veterinary Equestrian Show Jumping Cup, to be held in Lure (France) from 3rd to 6th July this year. The event is open to all qualified veterinarians and veterinary students, who may participate with or without their own horse.

The event will include four show-jumping competitions (one per day), while the social programme consists of a gala evening (Friday), a dinner-dance (Saturday, sponsored by Merial) and a Sunday lunch. The major sponsor of the event is Equistro/Vétoquinol.

The veterinary show-jumping event will coincide with France's 6th Grand National show-jumping competition, also held in Lure.

New award for equine vets

PETPLAN Equine is to sponsor a new award at this year’s Animal Health Trust Awards: the Petplan Equine Vet of the Year. This, says the company, is in recognition of the huge contribution made by local vets to the equine community. Owners and riders will be able to nominate their local equine vet for the award if they feel he or she is deserving of the recognition that this accolade would bring. A short list will be drawn up from the nominations received and an independent panel will judge the winner, who will receive the award at the AHT’s Equestrian Awards in London on 6th November.
Investment ideas for your 2008-09 ISA

THE ISA concept was introduced by the then Chancellor, Gordon Brown, in his first budget and was first made available to the public in 1999. ISAs are an effective wrapper for investments that protect funds deposited in them from both income and capital gains taxes, although unlike pensions they do not benefit from tax relief on contributions.

ISAs also have the added benefit of being easily accessible and funds can be removed as and when the investor wishes, although there are limits on contributions within each tax year. Currently ISAs (or individual savings accounts) are held by more than 16 million individual investors, with policies worth more than £180 billion.

In the current 2008-09 tax year, people will be allowed to save up to £3,600 into a cash ISA and up to £7,200 in a stocks and shares ISA, within an overall annual savings limit of £7,200. This is an increase on last year's contribution limits which were limited to £3,000 into a cash ISA and up to £7,000 in a stocks and shares ISA, within an overall annual savings limit of £7,000.

In addition, ISA savers will be able to invest in two separate ISAs each tax year: a cash ISA and a stocks and shares ISA. For example, investors can choose to save £1,000 in a cash ISA with one provider and £6,200 in a stocks and shares ISA with a different provider.

Also, the distinction between mini and maxi ISAs will no longer exist. Mini cash ISAs, TOISAs and the cash component of a maxi ISA will automatically become cash ISAs. Mini stocks and shares ISAs and the stocks and shares component of a maxi ISA will automatically become stocks and shares ISAs.

It should also be noted that from 6th April this year, all Personal Equity Plans (PEPs) will automatically become stocks and shares ISAs. Investors will be able to invest in this re-labelled PEP as long as they haven’t subscribed to another stocks and shares ISA during the current tax year.

Last December the Government also announced that any cash saved so far in ISAs could eventually be rolled forward into a new stocks and shares ISA, without infringing that year’s contribution limit. This means ISA savers will be able to transfer money saved in their cash ISA to their stocks and shares ISA.

So now we have dealt with the basic details, here are our top tips for ISA investment in the forthcoming tax year.

BlackRock Merrill Lynch Gold & General
During periods of economic uncertainty, like the one we are currently facing, investments into gold can be a highly attractive option. This is because gold is a stateless investment that has a universal appeal. The climate for gold is as good as it’s been in recent history.

The jewellery industry is the major market for this commodity and the enhanced wealth in the middle classes of India and China has dramatically escalated the demand for gold. This has meant that since 1999 the gold price has more than tripled, reaching an all-time peak of $913 an ounce on 15th January.

Even at current prices it looks excellent value and we think growing demand could continue to bolster the price. Although it must be remembered that this is not certain, and that prices may well go down as well as up.

We at Allchurch Bailey believe the (BlackRock) Merrill Lynch Gold & General Fund is an excellent way to invest in this sector and a great way for investors to benefit over the long term from the increased demand for gold.

Invesco Perpetual Monthly Income Plus
If you are looking for a high income with the potential for capital growth, and are able to invest for the long term, we believe you should definitely look at this fund.

First, it currently offers a yield of 7.5% gross (variable and not guaranteed). Within an ISA the income is completely tax-free, and you can either withdraw it monthly or roll it up with the fund enhancing growth.

Secondly, all the signals indicate that this could be one of the best times to invest in fixed interest for almost 10 years. The last time bonds were this attractive was the turn of the millennium.

Today yields are at a similar level to February 2000, but valuations are even lower. This means investors who act now have the opportunity to benefit from these income levels. In addition if valuations rise there is also the potential for capital growth.

Please remember though that all funds can fall in value as well as rise.

Finally, the fund has the capacity to invest throughout the market, and it is managed by one of the best fixed interest teams in the UK.

In summary, we believe this is an opportunity that we might not see again for many years. This is why we recommend the Invesco Perpetual Monthly Income Plus fund as an ideal home part of your 2008-09 ISA allowance.

Performance: 1 year, 1.01%; 3 years, 64.91%; 5 years, 191.98%.

NICO GOYMER discusses some of the options now available and provides some tips for this tax year

WORK WHEN AND WHERE YOU WANT!!

Locum and Permanent Veterinary Surgeons needed throughout the UK

- We’ll find assignments to suit your requirements
- We pay all our locums weekly
- Locums with us can qualify for up to 4 CPD days training a year (conditions apply)
- Most positions come with a car and accommodation

We always have 100’s of locum roles available throughout the UK. Short and long term, night shifts, weekends and part-time roles . . . the list is endless . . .

To find out more, please ring us on 01392 332858 or email info@rigvets.co.uk or see a selection of the vacancies on our website at www.rigvets.co.uk
Intervet advert to be on the back page