WSAVA/FECAVA/BSAVA CONGRESS

One health high on the agenda at world congress

This year, the annual BSAVA congress had an added dimension as the association also hosted the congresses of the World Small Animal Veterinary Association (WSAVA) and the Federation of European Companion Animal Veterinary Associations (FECAVA). A key theme of the congress, held in Birmingham from April 11 to 15, was ‘one health’ and how small animal vets can contribute globally. Kathryn Clark reports

‘It’s a small world in which our small profession can have a very big impact.’

So said the BSAVA president, Andrew Ash, explaining why ‘one health’ had been chosen as a major theme for the world congress: given the international aspects of this year’s congress, it had seemed particularly appropriate, he said.

Speaking at a press conference on the first morning of the congress, Mr Ash introduced Michael Day, the then junior vice-president of the BSAVA and chair of the WSAVA’s One Health Committee, who explained why it was important that companion animals ‘had a place at the table’ when one health issues were discussed.

In the early days of the one health initiative, the focus had very much been on food-producing animals, he said, with companion animals often overlooked. However, there were large numbers of companion animals in developed nations, and they were also important in developing countries – and there were huge one health issues associated with them. While, traditionally, it was dogs, cats and rabbits that were thought of when considering companion animals, a range of species were now being kept in the domestic environment; for example, Professor Day noted, the backyard chicken was fast becoming the third most popular companion animal in many countries, including the UK. There were health issues associated with the increasing range of species being kept as companion animals.

In terms of one health, companion animals had three main roles: in terms of the benefits brought by the human-companion animal bond; in terms of the potential for zoonotic disease spread; and in terms of comparative and translational research, where a variety of spontaneously arising diseases in animals could be investigated for the benefit of both animals and people.

Obesity, for example, was a classic example of one health in action. It was, he said, ‘the single biggest health issue facing both human and companion animal medicine’. With both people and companion animals suffering, addressing the issue in the companion animal could help address the issue in the person.

Rabies

Regarding zoonotic diseases and one health initiatives, the best example was rabies. ‘It is extraordinary that, in 2012, rabies still kills a minimum estimate of 55,000 people across the globe every year,’ Professor Day said. ‘Most of those are children, and most of those are children in Africa and Asia.’ Yet, by working collectively, rabies was a disease that the health professions, both medical and veterinary, could have an impact on. It had been identified by the WSAVA One Health Committee as an issue that was important for human health across the world to which small animal veterinarians could contribute. ‘This is a disease that people get from being bitten by dogs that carry the virus, and occasionally cats,’ he said. ‘So clearly this lies within our domain. We have the ability to do something about this.’

The committee was involved in talks with the Global Alliance for Rabies Control and Partners for Rabies Prevention, and hoped to announce a new joint initiative at the general assembly of the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) in May.

The WSAVA One Health Committee was working to take its message to international organisations with an interest in one health, such as the OIE, the World Health Organization, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in the USA. However, Professor Day said, the biggest challenge was encouraging human medical professionals to become involved. One health had started in the veterinary profession, and veterinarians, with their broad scientific training, understood why it was important. However, those in the medical profession ‘often don’t get it’, he said, and there was a need to ensure that they became engaged with the issues.

Antimicrobial resistance

Antimicrobial resistance is another key example of a one health issue, according to Alan Radford of the University of Liverpool. Dr Radford discussed how the Small Animal Veterinary Surveillance Network (SAVSNET) could contribute to a better understanding of resistance; SAVSNET is a joint project involving the University of Liverpool and the
BSAVA, which aims to provide information on the frequency of occurrence of diseases in the small animals seen by vets.

In terms of antibacterials, SAVSNET was looking at ‘the what, the why, the when and the where’ of antibacterial use in practice, Dr Radford said. It was hoped that data generated from the project would help to inform the debate in companion animals. It had two parallel strands to its surveillance programme, with data being gathered from diagnostic laboratories and also from small animal practices. SAVSNET was collecting the data, analysing it and aiming to make it as widely available as possible to the worldwide scientific community. ‘We feel that this is where best value can be got from the data,’ he said.

Data gathered so far from a group of vets in private practice had shown that, on average, almost 40 per cent of consultations resulted in the prescription of antibiotics, with cats receiving more than dogs. Also, almost 60 per cent of animals presenting with diarrhoea received antibacterials. The data had shown that there was a lot of variation between practices in terms of their prescribing of antibiotics. ‘What we want to do is give this information to practices and say “have a think about what you’re doing”,’ Dr Radford said. Practices that found themselves prescribing lots of antibiotics might wish to review their policies to help them decide whether they were appropriate, or whether they should be changed.

**Human-companion animal bond**

Also contributing to the press conference was Simon Orr, president of FECAVA, who discussed the importance of the human-companion animal bond. FECAVA had released a policy statement in 2011 that examined the role of veterinarians in animal-assisted therapies and activities. It recognised that the relationship between people and animals had changed quite significantly in the past 50 to 60 years, and that urban living meant that people, particularly children, had far fewer opportunities to relate to the natural environment. Animals could help with some of the relationship problems that people had as a result of this loss of communication with the natural environment, he said. He also discussed how dogs, in particular, could play a key role in assisting people in their daily lives.

**Different needs**

Taking questions after the presentations, Professor Day was asked how the WSAVA was going to tackle the disparate needs of the one health issue. For example, rabies had been chosen as a key concern, but while it was a very important issue in some parts of the world, in others antimicrobial resistance might be viewed as more important.

He responded by acknowledging that the WSAVA was a global organisation, and that it had to decide on what key issues it was to focus on. Rabies was such a global problem, affecting a high proportion of the WSAVA’s member countries, that it had been chosen as one of these key issues. Jolle Kirpensteijn, then the WSAVA president, added that, if vets in one part of the world had the knowledge to tackle a problem in other part of the world, they had a social responsibility to contribute.

Asked about the future development of SAVSNET, Dr Radford said that more data was needed, so it was hoped to make the project accessible to more veterinary practices and commercial laboratories over the course of the coming year. Also, there was no point in collecting data if nothing was done with it, so it was important that the data was made as accessible as possible to the public, to vets in practice and to scientists.

**Birmingham welcomes the world’s small animal vets**

Birmingham’s Convention Bureau estimates that the annual BSAVA Congress brings in £15 million to the regional economy each year, as a result of expenditure on accommodation, meals, events, entertainment, travel and other activities. This year, the flags were out to welcome over 5000 veterinary surgeons and 2000 veterinary nurses from 70 different countries to the city. Taking place from April 11 to 15, the congress offered 40 streams of lectures and masterclasses, including, for the first time at BSAVA, a practice management stream.

The commercial exhibition at this year’s congress, held jointly with the WSAVA and FECAVA, was the largest ever staged, with over 300 stands manned by more than 3000 exhibitors. As well as occupying the main floor of the National Indoor Arena in Birmingham, stands also spread up onto the concourse and balcony. Others were situated in the International Convention Centre, where most of the lectures were held. An additional marquee was also erected to accommodate the management lecture stream.

As is traditional at the congress, awards were presented for the best ‘space only’ stand in the exhibition, which this year was won by Vétoquinol. The award for the best large shell stand went to B. Braun Vet Care, while that for the best small shell stand was awarded to Fish4Dogs.

Also this year, the BSAVA introduced awards to recognise individual exhibitors for their ongoing and outstanding support of the BSAVA congress over the years. ‘Exhibitor Recognition of Service’ awards were presented to Chris Gee, John Lapish, Robert Long, Kevin O’Brien, Stuart Wilson, Barry Hughes and Gordon Logan.

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