

Tails you win — making the most of opportunities in veterinary pharmacy

Half of households own a pet. **Steven Kayne** reports from a meeting that looked at how community pharmacists can make the most of this statistic

Opening the meeting, the chairman Hemant Patel, President of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society, said that half of all households had at least one pet, ranging from dogs, cats, rabbits and horses to the more exotic snakes and spiders. Many of these owners visited their local pharmacy regularly, offering pharmacists the chance to become involved in important public health and animal welfare issues.

Challenges and opportunities

John FitzGerald, director of policy at the Veterinary Medicines Directorate, discussed the challenges and opportunities afforded by the new Veterinary Medicines Regulations that came into force on 30 October following an extensive period of consultation. The new Regulations superseded the Medicines Act 1968 that primarily regulated human medicines and replaced it with legislation specifically designed for veterinary medicines.

Mr FitzGerald explained that the Regulations would be updated annually and invited stakeholders to send the VMD feedback if it was thought that certain provisions were unworkable or unfair. An important opportunity for pharmacists lay in the fact that prescribing certain medicines was no longer restricted to veterinary surgeons. A new system of classification was in place but manufacturers would be allowed three years to comply with new requirements.

The veterinary market

Phil Sketchley, chief executive of the National Office of Animal Health, gave a brief outline of the veterinary market.

He said that there were different ways of expressing statistics, making comparisons difficult: some used sales from wholesalers and others retail sales. However it was clear that currently the biggest sector was for prescription-only medicines and although there could be minor relocations under the new Veterinary Medicines Regulations the position was unlikely to change greatly in the immediate future.

The market was growing, but it paled into insignificance when compared with that for human medicines; in some cases the value of the whole UK veterinary market at around

£420m barely covered the value of a single popular human drug.

Mr Sketchley suggested that pharmacists should work in synergistic partnerships with veterinary surgeons and manufacturers in order to gain greater direct support of manufacturers. This would expand the overall market segments rather than just slice the cake into more portions. It would also improve animal welfare and overall health status of the pet population and reduce the public health risk from zoonoses.

Millions of pets never got regular health checks, vaccination, wormers or flea treatment. Mr Sketchley said the worming market had the opportunity to grow by three or four times if all pets had basic treatment, and pharmacists could play a significant part in this expansion.

Assisting vets and their clients

Veterinary pharmacist David Evans, of Ilkeston, Derbyshire, used the case studies of Patch, a border collie, and Seamus, a German sheepdog, to demonstrate how the pharmacist could take an active part in assisting vets and their clients. Assistance was achieved by identifying interactions, locating sources of supply of certain low use or human medicines (where veterinary medicines are not available) and compounding veterinary medicines that were temporarily unavailable. Building confidence when dispensing veterinary prescriptions had led owners to switch their routine prophylaxis custom to his pharmacies.

Mr Evans introduced the idea of pharmaceutical care for pets and said he believed this was an emerging opportunity for pharmacists.

Zoonoses and public health

Martin Shakespeare, a veterinary pharmacist working at the Ministry of Defence, discussed the significance to public health of zoonoses. He said that zoonoses were defined by the World Health Organization as being “those diseases and infections which are naturally transmitted between vertebrate animals and man”.

The most significant zoonoses in terms of public health were those that, once across the species barrier, were capable of rapid human-to-human transmission. They ranged from the trivial to infections with the highest human mortality rates.

Other health risks were associated with food-borne organisms (including salmonella, bovine spongiform encephalitis and variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease), notifiable diseases (eg, anthrax) and emerging diseases (eg, West Nile virus and severe acute respiratory syndrome).

In conclusion, Mr Shakespeare said that all health professionals need an understanding of the infective pathways and significance of zoonotic diseases. Continual concerted efforts were needed in terms of quarantine, food hygiene and surveillance to ensure that any significant outbreak of zoonotic disease was controlled rapidly and treated appropriately.

The Society's veterinary pharmacy programme

Details of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society's veterinary pharmacy programme were given by Steven Kayne, of Glasgow, the joint course director. He said the aim of the programme was to provide the necessary knowledge so that pharmacists can dispense veterinary prescriptions and advise confidently on issues associated with keeping animals. There was no intention to convert pharmacists into pseudo-veterinary surgeons or encourage pharmacists to contravene the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 with respect to diagnosing and treating animal diseases, although new opportunities were emerging with the adoption of the Veterinary Regulations 2005 and the Department of Trade and Industry report on the supply of POMs by vets.

Dr Kayne explained that there were two elements to the programme:

- A certificate in companion animal healthcare, comprising two modules by distance learning
- A diploma in veterinary pharmacy, comprising a two further modules in addition to the certificate involved a residential week at Harper Adams University College in Shropshire

Dr Kayne invited pharmacists interested in establishing a pet care section to carry out some market research and see how many of their clients had pets and what needed to be stocked. They should join the Society's Veterinary Pharmacists Group and obtain some of the newly updated VPG leaflets on cats, dogs, horses and pigeons. *Veterinary Pharmacist*, the VPG newsletter (published within *The Pharmaceutical Journal*) provided a good way of keeping up to date. Stimulating interest at branch level could be helped by a new VPG PowerPoint presentation on pet care that was available from the VPG secretary (e-mail lorraine.fearon@rpsgb.org).

The Royal Pharmaceutical Society's **Veterinary Pharmacists Group** autumn seminar, “Tails you win”, took place at the Society's London headquarters on 8 November