



Veterinary *Pharmacist*

February 2007

FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Reader

A new year, and some good news about the availability of a well established flea and tick control product, previously restricted to prescription. Frontline Spot On can now be sold through pharmacies and other outlets. The switch took place last year, but distribution of the OTC pack has been a little slow.

This issue contains reports from the British Veterinary Association conference, the first animal pharmacy awards and the NOAH conference, which explored the role animal medicines can play in delivering safe food to consumers. With sessions entitled "Public attitudes to animal medicines" and "The proper use of animal medicines", however, it was disappointing that there was no direct pharmacy input. It is also a pity that, according to a British Cattle Veterinary Association survey, clients do not seem to be taking up the option of requesting a prescription from their vet for dispensing in a pharmacy (this page). The survey involved a limited number of respondents but, nonetheless, it would have been good to have seen a more positive result.

Congratulations to Sarah Cockbill for an excellent lecture given at the Veterinary Products Committee open day. Sarah covers the contribution to quality made by pharmacist members of the VPC on pS4. Our ever popular competition is back (this one is a real toughie!) and items of news include more on obesity and pet week. If you spot any items in your locality that you think are worthy of inclusion in *Veterinary Pharmacist* or have any comments, please send them to me at vetpharmnewsletter@yahoo.co.uk.

Finally an important date for your diary: the VPG summer conference will be held at Lambeth on 8 June. More details will follow.

Steven Kayne

Fipronil available over the counter



Reflecting a growing awareness for human health issues, owners are taking a more proactive role in their pets' health. A recent survey, conducted by Merial Animal Health, found that over one in 10 cats and dogs were suffering from fleas, and it is no surprise that flea treatment and prevention comes top of the pet owners list or requirements, according to a Mintel report.

Fleas found on pets are only the tip of the iceberg — 95 per cent exist unseen as eggs, larvae and pupae in the pet's environment. Adult fleas can lay up to 50 eggs a day (1,500 in a lifetime), so the problem escalates quickly. Pets with fleas act like salt-shakers, sprinkling flea eggs wherever they go. The eggs hatch into larvae which burrow into nooks and crannies within flooring and furniture. Here they develop a protective cocoon forming a pupa and lie dormant in the home for a considerable time before hatching as an adult flea to reinfest the pet(s) or to bite humans, potentially causing skin irritation or even the possibility of disease. The problem with fleas persists throughout the year, due to a warm environment created by central heating in the home. To ensure comprehensive protection from fleas it is, therefore, important that pets are treated all year round with a flea product that provides several weeks of flea control.

Over the course of a flea infestation, eggs, larvae and pupae can accumulate in the home.

To combat this problem it may be necessary to use an environmental spray to kill the eggs and larvae in fabric and furniture, in addition to treating pets. Unfortunately, there is no product that will kill flea pupae. This means that new fleas will hatch in fabric and furniture and can be seen for several weeks after the start of a flea control programme. To eradicate pupae, the house should be kept warm (to encourage them to hatch into adult fleas) and vacuumed regularly.

An effective flea and tick product should fulfil a number of desirable qualities:

- It should be easy to use and safe for both pets and owners
- It should protect against flea infestations for both cats (up to five weeks) and dogs
- It should be effective if a pet gets wet or is bathed
- It should be safe to use in puppies and kittens from eight weeks of age

Merial's Frontline Spot On (fipronil) fulfils these requirements. OTC packs are now available from wholesalers. The availability of this product offers pharmacists an opportunity to increase their pet care trade.

Merial will be supporting its product with a £1m television advertising campaign. — *John Toole, marketing executive at Merial Animal Health*

Most clients still getting medicines from vets

Only six out of 59 veterinary practices that responded to a questionnaire sent out by the British Cattle Veterinary Association said they had been asked by a client for a prescription to take elsewhere for dispensing, said Phil Sketchley, chief executive of the National

Office of Animal Health, during a BCVA Conference in Southport. Similarly, the *Veterinary Times* reports that a spokesman from the British Small Animals Veterinary Association estimated that less than one per cent his client base requested prescriptions.



Competition

This month's competition is the most difficult yet! Identify the breed of this animal, snapped at the Royal Highland Show last year, and give a sentence or two about the breed. Answers by e-mail to: vetpharmnewsletter@yahoo.co.uk. by 17 February 2007.



September 2006 winner *Veterinary Pharmacist* is delighted to report that our competition is still popular, with large numbers of entries. The picture in our September 2006 issue showed the rear quarters of a Belgian Blue. The first correct e-mail came from Heather Buchanan, an area development manager with Alliance Pharmacy in Ayrshire. Ms Buchanan received a small prize, courtesy of Freeman's Homoeopathic Pharmacy, Glasgow. Heather has been a community pharmacist for over 20 years and although her current role is management based, she still enjoys the interaction with the public and her team. The Belgian Blue is reared for its beef and its calves are born by caesarian section.

First awards for animal medicines industry

Merial Animal Health and Pfizer led the way at the inaugural Animal Health Industry Excellence Awards, hosted by television vet Trude Mostue and held in London on 12 October 2006.

Pfizer took the animal health company of the year award, while Merial won awards for the best new livestock product for Vaxxitek HVT + IBD, an innovative poultry vaccine that offers immunity against Marek's and Gumboro diseases, and best new equine veterinary product for EQUIOXX (firocoxib), a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory aimed at equine osteoarthritis. Together with business partner Bioject, Merial also secured the award for the best drug delivery advance, with PureVax, a feline rabies vaccine that uses needle-free technology developed by Bioject.

UK distribution specialist Centaur Services won the best manufacturing/production project award for its application of two dimensional barcode technology and Indian Immunologicals' remarkable Oper-

ation Pratirodh, which aims to make cattle vaccination affordable and accessible to rural Indian farmers, won the corporate social responsibility award. Other industry awards went to:

- Velcera Pharmaceuticals for its licensing deal with NovaDel Pharma over its transmucosal oral spray drug delivery technology (licensing deal of the year)
- Klifovet, a leading contract research company (best supporting role)
- Genitrix Animal Health and Nutrition (achievement or contribution by a small business)

Chief executive of the National Office of Animal Health, Philip Sketchley, presented a lifetime achievement award to Peter Holdsworth, chief executive of the new Australian Animal Health Alliance. Dr Holdsworth is a leading force behind the World Association for the Advancement of Veterinary Parasitology.

BVA congress news

Changing animal health and welfare requirements are placing new demands on the veterinary profession. At the same time, the profession is changing in terms of its composition and its members' expectations. The British Veterinary Association congress, held in London (29 September to 1 October 2006), examined the nature of these changes and the opportunities they present.

In many ways the skill mix problems highlighted were similar to those in pharmacy. Lynne Hill, immediate past president of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons, said the changing graduate profile indicates that within 10 years, 90 per cent of vets will be women. The effects could include more vets being required to do the same volume of work (due to women taking career breaks) and an accelerated move from large animal practice.

Ms Hill suggested that vets should communicate with other professions and see how they were dealing with the problem. A full report was published in the *Pharmaceutical Journal* (14 October 2006, p459).

Consumers confident in food industry

Recent research on consumer attitudes to animal medicines presented at the National Office of Animal Health conference, "Healthy animals — safe food" (held in London on 22 November 2006), has revealed consumers have confidence in all parts of the food chain — from farmer to retailer — and that the food they eat is safe. They trust the veterinary profession and farmers to use medicines responsibly to treat animals where and when appropriate. However, the research, undertaken by the Institute of Grocery Distribution on behalf of NOAH, also found some confusion among consumers relating to some areas of animal health. For example, some misunderstood the role that vaccines play in preventing disease and keeping animals healthy. Others demonstrated a level of misunderstanding about the positive role antibiotics can play in animal health.

Speakers from the animal health industry discussed the range of challenges faced by the industry, such as its presently diffuse role, public attitudes to animal medicine and emerging technologies. Other areas explored during the conference included the distribution of animal medicines, the role of vaccination in disease prevention, the relationship between farmer, vet and expert advisers, and the global challenge of disease-related issues.

There was no contribution at the conference from veterinary pharmacists.

National Pet Month starts in April

The National Pet Week charitable trust is celebrating its coming of age in 2007 by extending National Pet Week to a month. Pet food brands Iams and Eukanuba are supporting this year's programme which starts on 7 April. National Pet Month aims to:

- Promote responsible pet ownership
- Make people aware of the benefits of pets for people and people for pets
- Increase public awareness of services available from professionals who work with animals
- Raise awareness of the role, value and contribution to society of working companion animals

The theme is "Love is . . ." and events will take place throughout the month, including a special Wet Nose Day on 24 April, designed to encourage the public to celebrate pets, and communities and businesses to raise funds by holding their own events. All funds raised will go to pet and animal charities.

Pet owners make around 500,000 visits to pharmacies each day but only 750 non-specialist pharmacies sell animal medicines and these currently account for less than a 10 per cent share of the animal medicines market. National Pet Month is an ideal time for



pharmacists involved with animal medicines to highlight their involvement in animal care and the advice they can give. For example, they could have a National Pet Month window display.

Pharmacists who wish to get involved can register online (www.nationalpetmonth.org.uk), e-mail (info@nationalpetmonth.org.uk) or telephone the charitable trust (020 8370 3688) to receive a starter pack.

First slimming drug for dogs approved in US

According to *The Sunday Times* (7 January, 2007), the first slimming drug for dogs (dirglotapide; Slentrol) has been approved by the US Food and Drug Administration amid fears about increasing numbers of obese pets. The weight management drug, developed by Pfizer, reduces dogs' appetites and fat absorption. In clinical trials the weight of dogs was typically reduced by between 18 and 22 per cent.

Slentrol will cost up to US\$2 per day and is expected to be quickly introduced to the UK. The drug is taken in a liquid form and dog owners will be strongly warned not to take the drug themselves because it can dam-

age human livers. In trials on 550 dogs, no liver damage was observed. Potential canine side effects are vomiting and diarrhoea.

Veterinary surgeons estimate that about 40 per cent of dogs in Britain and the US are overweight. Obesity is linked to a range of increasingly common dog problems seen by vets, including cardiovascular conditions, diabetes, torn ligaments, sores on elbows and backs, and arthritis. Some breeds, such as beagles, dachshunds and labradors, appear to be particularly prone to becoming overweight.

A survey last year found 81 per cent of British vets considered obesity to be the biggest health threat facing dogs.

2007 will see more animal welfare laws

The Animal Welfare Act 2006 is the most significant piece of animal welfare legislation for nearly 100 years. Under current law, people responsible for pets can only be prosecuted for cruelty once suffering has occurred, and when it is often too late to save the animal from death or lasting injury.

The 2006 Act includes a new welfare offence which will, for the first time, protect thousands of animals from enduring serious ongoing neglect, by legally obliging owners to care for their pets properly.

Although the primary elements of the Act have been finalised, there are a number of issues, such as greyhound racing, animals in circuses, the sale of animals at pet shops and at pet fairs, which are the subject of secondary legislation and codes of practice, and which will continue to be considered this year.

New RUMA guidelines on vaccines and vaccination

The Responsible Use of Medicines in Agriculture (RUMA) Alliance has issued new guidelines on the responsible use of vaccines and vaccination in farm animals. The guidelines come in two formats: short, giving concise information to farmers, and long, aimed at those advising farmers, such as veterinary surgeons. There is a general guideline giving an overview of responsible vaccination for all farm species, and species specific guidelines: guidelines for pigs, poultry, sheep and fish are now available and guidelines for cattle are being prepared.

The guidelines are available at www.ruma.org.uk.

Alzheimer's disease in cats

Cats can suffer from a feline form of Alzheimer's disease, according to research published in the *Journal of Feline Medicine*. It has long been known that cats can suffer from dementia and previous research has identified thick, gritty plaques on the outside of the brain cells of old cats, similar to those found in humans, but a key protein linked to mental deterioration in cats has now been identified.

The shorter lifespan of cats may make it easier for scientists to determine how the dementia develops. Postmortem examination may uncover vital clues about how the condition develops and lead to new treatments. Experts suggest good diet, mental stimulation and companionship can reduce the risk of dementia in both humans and cats.

2007 National Office of Animal Health Compendiums available

The 2007 edition of the National Office of Animal Health Compendium of Data Sheets for Animal Medicines has been published and is available for £35 from NOAH. It contains full data sheets and summaries of product characteristics for products in all legal categories (POM-V through to medicines marketed under the small animal exemption scheme) from 40 companies. New to this edition are colour-coded indexes to make navigation easier, and a guide to the prescribing cascade. The online version of the compendium (available at: www.noahcompendium.co.uk) now includes easy-reference withdrawal period tables. A compendium of data sheets for animal medicines that are intended to treat companion animals and equine species and which can be supplied without veterinary prescription has also been published. This costs £10.



Licensing of veterinary medicines: the role of pharmacist members on the VPC

Sarah Cockbill, one of two pharmacists appointed to the Veterinary Products Committee, gave a lecture at the VPC open day in London in November 2006. In this article, Dr Cockbill presents a summary of her lecture

Standards for the quality, safety and efficacy of animal medicines (as were those for human medicines) were first identified under the auspices of the 1968 Medicines Act. This was drafted after the results of the Swann Report into thalidomide incidents during the 1960s were made public. Before 1968, there were no legal controls over the production of medicinal products or the claims made relating to their scope of action. Things moved on in veterinary medicine terms through European directives that came in to force in January 1995 and, as of the 30 October 2006, the Medicines Act 1968 was disapplied to veterinary medicines and all aspects related to the licensing and control of animal medicines are now defined by the Veterinary Medicines Regulations 2006 — which will be revised on an annual basis.

The Veterinary Products Committee (VPC) is comprised of professionals from many disciplines, including pharmacists, toxicologists, microbiologists, statisticians and environmentalists, the Food Standards Agency and, as may be predicted, eminent veterinary surgeons from many areas of their profession, including large animal, small ani-

mal, fish, exotics and academia. The two appointed VPC pharmacist members contribute in many ways which often come as a surprise to other members of the committee because they have no real appreciation of the educational hurdles that have to be covered before someone is registered as a pharmacist. In general, pharmaceutical contributions to discussions around marketing authorisation applications are related to assessment of quality aspects associated with formulation, manufacturing method(s) and validation or stability studies of applications, both from within the UK and centralised applications from other members of the EU. We also hear appeals from manufacturers if they believe their applications have been dealt with unfairly.

The VPC has the mandate to give scientific safety advice on the manufacturer's interpretation of data from pharmacokinetic studies which often use radio-labelled materials to determine the metabolism of the new compound and its metabolites together with their possible impact on human safety, the conduct and relevance of toxicological studies, analysis of adverse effects, and compliance with rele-

vant pharmacopoeial and European guidelines. It can also make recommendations for further studies if necessary. We also consider the appropriateness of risk assessment, exposure and proposed risk management, residue depletion studies (which include residues at injection sites) and, uniquely for animals in the human food chain, the derivation of recommended withdrawal periods for any medicine, anthelmintic therapy or treatment. There is little that the pharmacist members of the VPC can contribute to discussion relating to the results of efficacy studies because this is, as may be predicted, principally the province of the veterinary surgeons.

Quality is yet another area in which pharmaceutical expertise is needed and valued in a professional, collaborative and multidisciplinary working environment. No other profession is trained as we are in chemistry, formulation, compounding and ingredient interactions and we have a golden opportunity to demonstrate effectively to members of the Veterinary Medicines Directorate and, through them, to ministers that pharmacists are truly experts in medicines for both human and animal treatment.

A depressing Christmas for animals

Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals centres have reported that they are "bursting at the seams" as people abandon their pets in record numbers. According to the charity, although many animals are middle-aged or elderly, most are arriving in good condition. It notes that unclaimed pets are arriving at its centres earlier every year and suggests that this is down to unscrupulous owners turning out their older pet, either to make way for a new Christmas pet or to simply avoid caring for their pet during the busy, festive season.

Dogs Trust, the UK's largest dog welfare charity, was inundated with abandoned animals over the festive period. There also appears to be a significant problem with rabbits — now the most abused domestic pet in England and Wales, with 35,000 abandoned every year. On average, abandoned rabbits are dumped after just three months. Many are simply released in the street or into the wild. One survey reported by the BBC (10 December 2006) found that 70 per cent of



Rabbits are now the most abused domestic pet in England and Wales

rescued rabbits had been kept hunched 24 hours a day. Almost 40 per cent had had no food and half had been living in filthy conditions. The first National Rabbit Week took place in January and aimed to highlight the rise in obesity and dental problems in rabbits due to inappropriate diets and lifestyles.

From the VPG chairman

The start of 2007 was accompanied by optimism for the future of veterinary pharmacy: there is a noticeable increase in the interest in the Society's Diploma in Veterinary Medicine and in the Certificate in Companion Animal Healthcare. And this year, for the first time, a Certificate in Livestock Medicine for Support Staff is being made available.

The annual VPG conference is to be held in Lambeth on 8 June. The Society's conference suite has been recently refurbished and can certainly be classed as a state of the art facility. It is hoped that delegates will be given a tour round the main parts of the Society and get to meet some of the faces behind the names. It will be a great opportunity to see our fine building and its impressive setting beside the Thames. The conference will look to the future, the theme being veterinary pharmacy in 2020.

Finally, the professional secretarial work for the VPG is now being carried out by Meghna Joshi, one of the practice division's newest pharmacists. If her first few months work are anything to go by she is going to be greatly valued by the group. —

Andrew Cairns