

## **UEVP online meeting**

### **The impact of COVID on veterinary practice**

*Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the traditional spring GA of the Union of European Veterinary Practitioners (UEVP) was cancelled and replaced by an online forum. Some 60 participants connected on June 4th and shared a Go-to meeting. 'This is a historical online meeting, a first of its kind – but hopefully also the last,' said Piotr Kwieciński, UEVP president, welcoming online participants. He also announced that this meeting would not be considered a true general assembly, so no voting would be held, and no formal decisions taken.*

#### **The impact of COVID: 'relatively minor' in most countries...**

Not surprisingly, the main discussion point of the meeting was the COVID-19 pandemic, and how it had affected the profession in the various member countries.

Fortunately, in most countries, the profession has only suffered minor set-backs. 'Our survey showed that most practices were working at normal level,' reported Dietmar Gerstner (Austria). Representatives from the Czech republic (Karel Daniel), Denmark (Steen Bo Larsen), the Netherlands (Rens van Dobbenburgh), Hungary (Zsolt Pinter) and Switzerland (Olivier Glardon) also said that practices had been busy in their respective countries, with biosecurity measures in place. 'Fortunately, the veterinary profession was considered 'essential' quite early on in the outbreak,' said Marie Modal (Norway). Representatives from Germany (Siegfried Moder), Ireland (Peter Bishton) and France (Christophe Buhot) said that they were able to convince their government of the essential role of veterinarians.

#### **...but not easy everywhere**

However, in some countries, the consequences of the lockdown were quite severe for the profession, in particular in companion animal practice. 'In the north of Italy, 55% of vets were out of work during the first phase of lockdown – only around 30% were able to work normally' reported Giuliano Lazzarini (Italy). 'In Spain, most small animal practices suffered a 35-50% decrease in turnover in April due to the strict lockdown, with younger vets being laid off,' said Jordi Franch. In Serbia, large animal practices suffered too, as they needed special permission to make visits after 5 pm, according to Miroslav Urosevic. In Russia, many smaller clinics had to close, and a number of colleagues caught COVID-19, although none had died, Tatiana Krasnova said.

Although there was a decrease in the amount of work in companion animal practice in the UK, there was an excellent government furlough scheme, according to Nick Stuart (support up to 80% of income, to a cap of £2,500), which was widely used by practitioners.

Nevertheless, 'the UK has suffered badly from COVID-19, and Brexit does not make it better.' In Belgium, companion animal practice had been hard hit, too, and there had been much discussion whether or not to stay open, Alain Schonbrodt commented.

#### **One Health: the profession 'undervalued'**

The COVID pandemic had also highlighted the role of veterinarians in One Health. Many countries reported the collection of ventilators for hospitals, even though these were not always needed. 'In any case, it was a good occasion to push the importance of One Health,' commented Hanna Nurmi. In Greece, many vets had assisted the Ministry of Health, in helping with diagnostic testing and measuring temperatures, Athina Trachili told the audience. In Serbia, veterinary laboratories also showed that they could assist in COVID testing. However, the potential contribution of the profession was undervalued in many

cases. In France, manufacturers of diagnostic tests had offered their services – to no avail. ‘Even the support of veterinary diagnostic laboratories to carry out COVID testing was not recognised or accepted,’ regretted Christophe Buhot (France). This had also happened in Germany, where ‘the human medical profession found it difficult to accept the support offered.’ In some countries, like Switzerland, the situation had led to the discussion of ‘how to make better use of veterinarians, in order to have a real One Health approach.’

### **Other COVID consequences**

Several countries mentioned a shortage in protective personal equipment.

In Sweden, more people at home had led to an increased demand for kittens and puppies, and thereby the illegal trade of pets.

In the Netherlands, mink farms had been found positive for COVID-19 due to infected staff, and tests in mink farms were ongoing in other countries (Greece, Spain, Denmark).

Germany reported on problems of vet students finding work experience, while Spanish vet schools had moved to online training, with practical sessions to be held later this summer.

The practice posters with infographs on hygiene measures produced by FECAVA and FVE were greatly appreciated, and had been translated into many different languages.

Telemedicine had increased in several countries, and an 18-month trial period had been set up in France.

Finally, in Germany the VAT had been lowered from 19 to 16% for six months, to encourage spending. This would hopefully also benefit veterinary practices.

### **A new role for VetCEE**

‘VetCEE has become established as an organisation that sets the standard to validate middle-tier programmes,’ recalled Andrew Robinson. The founding members (EAEVE, EBVS, FVE and UEVP) have asked VetCEE to increase its remit with the following three objectives: Become a leader in accrediting CPD quality; set up a system of mutual recognition of CPD across Europe; and extend the scope of the mission to accredit all kinds of CPD providers and disciplines. The new strategy will be discussed during its 16 July board meeting, and is likely to be finalised and adopted by the end of 2020.

Founded in October 1970, the UEVP will celebrate its 50th anniversary this year. The event is scheduled for the general assembly in Prague, on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the Czech Veterinary Chamber. ‘Let’s hope no unforeseen situation interferes with the celebrations,’ Piotr Kwieciński commented during his closing speech.

Upcoming general assembly: Prague, 5 November 2020.

• *Karin de Lange*

### **And also...**

Due to the unusual format of the meeting, all other updates were submitted as written reports only. Full reports can be found online. Highlights include:

- Medicines Working Group: working on a position paper on the veterinary use of cannabis and cannabis-derived products
- Animal Welfare Working Group: working on the FVE animal welfare strategy (first draft to be ready by end July); draft paper on farrowing crates for sows and enriched cages for hens. New members.
- Food Quality and Safety Working Group: renamed to become the Food and Sustainability working group. New members.

- European Board of Veterinary Specialisation: working on flexible pathways to specialisation.
- European Coordinating Committee on Veterinary Training: creation of Working Group on Digital Technologies and Artificial Intelligence. New website ([eccvt.fve.org](http://eccvt.fve.org)).
- Federation of European Equine Veterinary Associations: draft paper on euthanasia of horses.
- Federation of European Companion Animal Veterinary Associations: production of COVID-19 posters for vets and pet owners, Mental health support. Cancellation of FECAVA/WSAVA congress (postponed to March 2021).
- European Association of Zoo and Wildlife Veterinarians: many zoos in trouble, some facing bankruptcy – with significant consequences for conservation and animal welfare; guidelines on SARS-CoV2 in zoo animals. Annual meeting in May replaced by online conference in July.