

UEVP report GA Malta

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Workforce challenges and veterinary independence

The current lack of veterinary workforce experienced by many countries was clearly visible in Malta, host of the UEVP general assembly on 24 November. With around 160 veterinarians, Malta (316 sq km, pop 500,000) only has four large animal practitioners looking after 15,000 heads of cattle, 30,000 pigs and 14,000 small ruminants, reported Lino Vella (Malta), *'so we clearly have a problem.'* The mainstay of Malta's food animal production is tuna farming, he added *'we catch them in the wild, then feed them before exporting them to Japan'* (29,000 tons per year) – and rabbits, with an annual production of 2.4 million. But Brexit has also had an impact on the profession, as veterinary medicines availability has become a challenge on the Mediterranean island. *'We import all our drugs from the UK, as English labelling is mandatory...'*

Independence of veterinarians

Professional pathways and independence of the veterinarian was on top of the UEVP agenda, during a joint session with European Veterinarians in Education, Research and Industry (EVERI) and the European Association of State Veterinary Officers (EASVO).

'Independence for a vet working in industry is not always easy,' admitted Massenzio Fornasier (EVERI), *'as this may create a conflict of interest.'* Presenting the reflection paper on vets working in the health and food sectors, he added that *'your decisions will sooner or later have a real impact on a patient, so apply the pillars of medical ethics: first do no harm, second act with caution and third, promote healing.'*

Speaking on behalf of the practitioners, Zsolt Pinter warned about the fact that there were now 'aquatic animal health professionals' according to EU law. *'We should beware – what if this is extended to the pig and poultry sectors?'* He also warned against the potential loss of independence of veterinarians working for corporate practices. During the debate that followed, Mette Uldahl (Denmark) agreed to be cautious but said vets should not create a 'them/us' situation. Mike Jessop – *'from the UK, the corporate capital of the world'* – noted that the corporate pattern is changing and that small independent practices are now on the increase.

'To vet' vs. 'to doctor'

'The meaning of 'to vet' is to 'examine carefully and critically' while 'to doctor' means "to deceive or to falsify",' recalled Jane Clark (EASVO). *'In that respect, as state veterinary officers, we definitely 'vet'!*' She went on to describe the variety of careers in veterinary services.

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While most veterinary students want to work in the field of veterinary medicine, many do not want to be self-employed, and when choosing their job, *'income and location are the main motivators'*, according to a recent student survey, said Vanda Dučić, representative of the International Veterinary Students' Association (IVSA). She added that rural areas should be made more attractive as most young people *'live in the fast lane'*.

'There's a slippery slope from wanting to be nice and compliant to turning a blind eye or changing the date on a certificate,' warned Mette Uldahl (Denmark) during her presentation *'how to be an authority'*. It's important to define your own values and develop strategies for handling pressure, she said.

Ukraine: towards a statutory body

'Many of our colleagues are involved in the war, some were wounded, some were killed and some were captured, and it is difficult to assess how many.' Thanking the UEVP for its continued support, the Ukrainian delegation went on to describe how they were working to create a self-governing statutory body for Ukrainian veterinarians. UEVP president Piotr Kwieciński also announced the creation of a *'Ukrainian Veterinary Embassy'* at the Malta venue to allow international associations and individuals get in touch directly.

Christine Fossing (Denmark) and Petra Sindern (Germany) reported on the establishment of the international collaboration on extreme conformations in dogs (ICD), a multi-stakeholder group founded in 2019 with the aim *'to help minimize welfare issues resulting from extreme conformations in dogs.'* Those interested should get in touch with former UEVP delegate and FECAVA past president Monique Megens.

Guest speaker Elena Pavlidou (Greece) presented the Asclepius One Health Organisation and announced the creation of MEDOHC, the Mediterranean One Health Innovation Centre, which provides seminars and undertakes research in various One Health topics.

Bob Carrière (UEVP treasurer) suggested producing a card game to promote the profession among young people. Although many liked the idea, it was suggested to use an application or a virtual card game instead if young people were to be the target audience.

Member associations

- FECAVA (companion animals): Ann Criel reported on her Federation's activities, including the first Middle East and African Veterinary Congress, initiatives for Ukrainian veterinarians (including a fact sheet on post-traumatic stress disorder in pets), responsible breeding and mental health tools.
- EAPHM (pigs): Giovannbattista Guadagnini reported on animal welfare initiatives, and the control of African Swine Fever – *'we're in a very big storm and cannot see the end'* – including the future development of oral vaccines.
- PVSGEU (poultry): Stephen Lister announced that his association had applied for full membership of the UEVP. He also described the current situation of highly pathogenic avian influenza, which had become a year-round, global problem, and he called for vaccines and mental health advisers for younger colleagues.
- FEEVA (horses): Heidi Kellokoski-Kiiskinen presented Andrea Bignoli (Italy) as new FEEVA vice president and said that a recent survey had shown *'an alarming*

dissatisfaction with equine education.' Her association was also planning an awareness campaign on African Horse Sickness and would focus on the welfare of horses in meat production.

- EAZWV (zoo and wildlife): Allan Muir described the event of a summer school for students and recalled the availability of his association's online resources, including factsheets and a transmissible diseases handbook.

The spring 2023 UEVP general assembly will be held on 15 June 2023 in Zaječí, Czech Republic.

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