

Reports and Comments

Advancing Animal Welfare and the 3Rs in the Batch Testing of Veterinary Vaccines

European Directive 2001/82/EC requires quality control tests to be conducted on veterinary medicinal products to ensure batch-to-batch consistency. The required tests for vaccines include those to address both safety and efficacy. Data on numbers of animals used in these quality control tests have not been routinely collected so annual fluctuations and trends are unclear. Some idea of scale is given by data released by the UK's Veterinary Medicines Directorate in 2005 on the number of animals used in quality control tests in 2003 for veterinary vaccines authorised for use in the UK. This year a total of 31,047 animals were used (of which 34% were poultry and 28% were mice).

Jane Cooper and Maggy Jennings of the RSPCA's Science Group have published a review of this subject to provide a summary of the regulatory requirements and in pursuit of identifying areas and aspects in which welfare improvements could be made. The Report concludes that, whilst veterinary vaccines protect millions of animals from disease, the quality control tests used in vaccine production can cause considerable suffering. And, in stating that "there is enormous potential for replacing or refining many of the tests that cause the most suffering, and that there is also scope for discontinuing some tests altogether", it throws down a considerable challenge.

Twenty-seven recommendations are made which cover a wide range of aspects, some general and some specific. For example, Recommendation 2 calls on funders of research and vaccine manufacturers to "focus efforts on the development and validation of alternative methods of assessing batch potency..." and Recommendation 26 says "the number of animals for batch safety testing of bird and fish vaccines should be reduced to two..." to bring this in line with testing regimes for vaccines for other species.

The Report includes tables summarising batch potency test requirements for inactivated vaccines for use in birds, for inactivated clostridial vaccines (eg specifying which species are to be used), and for inactivated vaccines for use in fish, dogs, cats, ruminants and other animals. Tables are also included summarising the numbers of animals required for these tests.

Advancing Animal Welfare and the 3Rs in the Batch Testing of Veterinary Vaccines (2008). Cooper J & Jennings M, Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. A4, 62 pages. Available from the Science Group, RSPCA, Wilberforce Way, Southwater, Horsham, West Sussex RH13 9RS and at www.rspca.org.uk/sciencegroup.

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Scoping Report on Companion Animal Welfare Surveillance

Knowledge of the status of animal welfare, of the nature of the main problems and of their prevalence, is important for endeavours to focus efforts where they are most needed for major improvements. In view of this, and having the impression that there is very little formal monitoring of the welfare of companion animals in the UK, the Companion Animal Welfare Council (CAWC) has recently undertaken a scoping study on this subject. The aim was to undertake some preliminary thinking addressing the following:

- to define more clearly the task of welfare surveillance and its potential benefits;
- to estimate the scale of this task;
- to consider approaches and whether these are (a) possible and (b) practically and economically feasible;

and to produce a brief review with recommendations regarding the way forward, and to initiate debate on the subject.

In its report (see details below) the CAWC concluded that there are very good reasons to try to develop a system for companion animal welfare surveillance; the most important point being that it is likely to help greatly in improving companion animal welfare.

Further, that although developing a scheme would present significant challenges, the enthusiasm and support for the development of a scheme expressed by representatives of many of the key organisations that would be likely to be involved, were encouraging and that efforts should be made to begin a pilot scheme.

Scoping Report on Companion Animal Welfare Surveillance (2008). Companion Animal Welfare Council. A4, 12 pages. Available from The CAWC Secretariat, The Dene, Old North Road, Bourn, Cambridge CB23 2TZ, UK or as specified at www.cawc.org.uk.

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Humane Dog Population Management Guidance

A comprehensive guidance booklet has recently been produced by the International Companion Animal Management Coalition (ICAM Coalition), their aim being: 'to provide guidance on how to assess dog population management needs and how to decide upon the most effective and resource-efficient approach to managing the population in a humane manner'.

The ICAM Coalition was formed in 2006 of representatives from a number of groups with interests in the humane management of roaming companion animal population

management: the World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA), the Humane Society International (HSI), the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW), Royal Society for the Protection of Cruelty to Animals International (RSPCA International), the Universities Federation for Animal Welfare (UFAW), the World Small Animal Veterinary Association (WSAVA) and the Alliance for Rabies Control (ARC). By working together these bodies aim to create a forum in which ideas and data may be exchanged and a common, co-ordinated approach to managing dog populations worldwide developed.

Humane Dog Population Management Guidance is the first publication of the ICAM. It is aimed at both government and non-governmental organisations engaged in dog population management and the key theme running throughout is “the need for a comprehensive programme that is focused on causes and not solely on treating the symptom, namely the roaming dog population”. It is recognised that every situation is different and that there is no one solution. Consequently, a great deal of emphasis is placed on initial collection and assessment of data to facilitate understanding of the population dynamics at a local level. Once this first step has taken place, an evaluation of which factors are of particular importance may be carried out, followed by the development of an integrated population control programme.

Key factors to consider, ideas for tackling certain issues and case studies are used throughout the document to illustrate the Coalition’s ideas. For example, a case study describing the development of a network of dedicated volunteers in one Asian city to help tackle a roaming dog population demonstrates that innovative ways of using existing resources can be very successful. A network of individuals able to take in unwanted animals and the establishment of an internet site to facilitate rehoming of fostered animals proved to be a success in a situation where many other control methods had failed.

An informative read, this document is a useful resource for all those involved in the humane control of roaming dog populations, and for those interested in gaining a wider understanding of the complexities involved in dealing with roaming companion animals.

Humane Dog Population Management Guidance (2008). A4, 22 pages. International Companion Animal Management Coalition. Available for download from: www.icam-coalition.org.

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Responsibility in the Use of Animals in Bioscience Research: Expectations of the Major Research Council and Charitable Funding Bodies

A group of major UK-based organisations, active in funding laboratory animal research, have recently collaborated to develop an informative 22 page guide covering the responsible use of vertebrate animals in bioscience studies. Although animals involved in scientific research are protected by the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 (ASPA), the National Centre for Replacement, Refinement

and Reduction of Animals in Research (NC3Rs), the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC), the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC), the Medical Research Council (MRC), and the Wellcome Trust, have sought to make their own expectations clear. Together they deem that “high standards in the design and conduct of animal research and full implementation of the 3Rs are important for ethical reasons and to obtain the best possible scientific results”. To this end, the guidelines that they have produced briefly cover:

- a summary of the legal control on animal use;
- the responsibilities of the relevant parties;
- the principles and procedures of the funding bodies;
- the requirements for research or collaborations outside of the UK.

Whilst this document is not a comprehensive resource on its own, it does outline areas that should be taken into account by individuals involved in animal research. Topics covered include: breeding and supply; capture, handling, restraint and training of animals; humane endpoints; staff training and animal health and welfare. Within each section a background explanation is given together with link(s) to website pages providing more detailed information and also containing further links and information resources of their own.

Implementation of the principles outlined in these guidelines is now a condition of receiving funding from the NC3Rs, BBSRC, NERC, MRC and the Wellcome Trust. This booklet therefore provides a useful, single point of reference for researchers hoping to gain support from these organisations for projects involving the use of animals. The document is also expected to be of use to veterinary and animal care staff, ethics committees, referees, and Board and Committee members involved in reviewing research proposals.

Responsibility in the Use of Animals in Bioscience Research: Expectations of the Major Research Council and Charitable Funding Bodies (2008). A4, 22 pages. Joint publication by the NC3Rs, BBSRC, NERC, MRC, and the Wellcome Trust. Available for download from the NC3Rs website at: www.nc3rs.org.uk/responsibility.

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Welfare Quality®: Project Update

Reliable, science-based, on-farm animal welfare assessment systems are key to improving the welfare of farmed livestock species. For a number of years, the Welfare Quality® project has been developing and trialling a number of extensive on-farm assessment systems and observations are now complete for dairy cows, beef cattle, laying hens and broilers. It is expected that trials for sows, fattening pigs, and veal calves will be concluded by the end of this year. Over 600 farms across the EU are involved in the testing of these comprehensive systems and it is hoped that the subsequent analysis of farm trials will reveal relationships between different animal-based measures and facilitate the development of a simplified version of the full assessment system for each species.