

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