Veterinary Research News

Practice

Taking on cancer

Cancer is a leading cause of death in dogs and cats—particularly now that more pets are living long enough to develop the disease. At the same time, more pets are receiving treatment for cancer, and those treatments are improving, according to experts in the field of companion animal oncology.

Here, a handful of the many veterinarians who treat or study cancer in pets discuss their work and share their optimism about progress in the fight against the disease.

Members of the family

Overall interest in and experience with companion animal oncology have increased over the past several decades as people have placed more value on pets, said Dr. Laura Garrett, president of the Veterinary Cancer Society and a diplomate of the American College of Veterinary Internal Medicine's specialty of oncology. She is a clinical associate professor at the University of Illinois College of Veterinary Medicine.

It is much more common now to treat pets with cancer, Dr. Garrett said.

"Pets very much are members of the family for many people, and thus, there is more motivation and dedication to try to prolong lives," Dr. Garrett said, adding "and then we can discuss how most of the treatments are very well-tolerated." She explained that many pet owners fear cancer treatment will diminish quality of life.

Dr. Garrett noted that veterinarians have access, via extralabel use, to the growing armamentarium of chemotherapy drugs for humans. Some drugs started off being prohibitively expensive but became affordable as generic versions were released.

Back in 1976, a group of veterinarians formed the Veterinary Cancer Society. The society has developed from a conference organizer into an association of more than 800 members with an interest in veterinary oncology. The society's website at www.vetcancersociety.org offers a variety of resources, including information about clinical trials.

Over the years, oncology also has become a part of the curriculum at veterinary colleges and the continuing education program at veterinary conferences, Dr. Garrett said. As a result, many general practitioners are outstanding at treating cancer in pets, consulting specialists, or referring cases when necessary.

As an oncologist, Dr. Garrett finds it satisfying "to talk to owners about their goals and their expectations; their financial constraints and abilities, what have you, because that does become part of it; and then come up with a plan that is going to work for them. And as long as the pet feels good and the owner is happy with what is going on, then I think we're doing our job well."

Finding answers

Oncology is a rich scientific area where new knowledge translates quickly to the clinic, said Dr. Chand Khanna, who works in comparative oncology at the National Cancer Institute and practices at The Oncology Service in Washington, D.C., and Virginia. He is immediate past president of the oncology specialty within the American College of Veterinary Internal Medicine.

At the National Cancer Institute, Dr. Khanna studies osteosarcoma in dogs and children. Advances in cancer treatment have not yet led to meaningful improvements for patients with osteosarcoma, he said.

"The field of cancer is really, I think, an area where the perspective of veterinary training—which includes this comparative view of biology—is very important," Dr. Khanna said. "We as veterinarians have a view towards problem solving that is really based in an understanding that we can ask the important questions and then go figure out how to answer those questions."

Comparative oncology has gone through tremendous growth, he said. As one example, he pointed to his work with the new Comparative Oncology Trials Consortium of veterinary colleges to conduct clinical trials of chemotherapeutic drugs in dogs.

Courtesy of Dr. Zachary M. Wright

Cancer treatment at VCA Animal Diagnostic Clinic in Dallas

In his practice, Dr. Khanna has found that clients recognize that cancer is not a death sentence for pets. He talks with clients about the goals, risks, and costs of treatment options.

"As cancer therapies become more effective and as we become more able to discuss cure as an outcome, then the decision making around cost is really quite different, different than if you're discussing a treatment that is only going to make something better for a short period of time," Dr. Khanna said.

From terrible to manageable

Most of the knowledge and treatments in companion animal oncology come from the fields of human or comparative oncology, but research focusing on cancer in pets is progressing on a number of fronts.

Among other endeavors, the Morris Animal Foundation funds studies in veterinary oncology. Dr. David Haworth, president of the foundation, said, "Cancer is really where there are some fascinating questions that are being answered, and there are real improvements that are being made."

Dr. Haworth said that when he was growing up in the 1970s, cancer seemed to be a death sentence even for people. He believes cancer has transformed from a terrible diagnosis to a more manageable disease, both for people and for pets.

Morris has funded more than 200 studies of cancer in dogs, cats, and other animals. The foundation has started the Canine Lifetime Health Project, longitudinal research of the sort that has led to many advancements in human medicine. The first study is the Golden Retriever Lifetime Study, which will follow 3,000 Golden Retrievers from birth to death looking at cancer and other conditions.

Dr. Haworth said Golden Retrievers appear to have a predisposition to certain cancers. Objectives of the lifetime study include identifying how factors such as genetics, environment, and diet affect the dogs' cancer risk.

Morris continues to seek study participants. Information is available at www.caninelifetimehealth.org.

When Dr. Haworth went into practice in 1999 after serving a fellowship in cancer biology, he felt as though he was the one guy who was willing to try chemotherapy in patients. Now, some general practitioners in every community are treating cancer in pets, he said.

"We already have pretty effective ways to deal with most cancer, if you can catch it early enough and if you have owners who are willing to go through it," Dr. Haworth said. "We need to learn as a profession to deal with cancer for what it is. It's just a disease; it's not magic, it's not evil."

Offering hope

Dr. Rodney Page has always been amazed by the commitment and sacrifices that many pet owners will make to treat pets with cancer.

"What I like about the job that I do is the ability to really help people through a critical time, provide some reliable information for them to base a decision on, and to offer hope in a time when it's really a struggle," said Dr. Page, director of the Flint Animal Cancer Center at Colorado State University and scientific leader of the Golden Retriever Lifetime Study.

One source of hope is new and emerging treatments. At Flint, these include radiation therapy that targets tumors precisely and use of patients' genetics to predict the effectiveness of various chemotherapeutic drugs. The cancer center has a stand-alone unit for clinical trials, with 20 to 30 trials conducted annually.

"It's an opportunity for owners to think about how they can contribute, going forward, to new innovations in health care for pets as well as for people," Dr. Page said.

He said studies of treatments for certain cancers in companion animals better predict safety and efficacy for humans than do rodent trials.

Flint also offers a free consultation service for pet owners and general practitioners. Dr. Page said the service provides about 3,000 consultations annually, with inquiries coming from around the world. Information is available at www.csuanimalcancercenter.org/consult-service.

Last frontier

"To me, a successful outcome is the clients at the end of the road, whenever that may be, are grateful and happy with the results, even if it means three more days or three more years," said Dr. Zachary M. Wright, an oncologist who treats patients and participates in clinical trials at VCA Animal Diagnostic Clinic in Dallas.

Dr. Wright has practiced in several locations and said his practice volume has increased everywhere he's gone as more pet owners are willing to have a conversation about treating cancer in pets. He attributes their willingness to the growing number of pets living long enough to develop cancer, pets' value as family members, and improvements in the availability and affordability of many treatments.

He said one of the coolest new treatments is drugs that target cancer cells precisely, in place of the sledgehammer approach of most chemotherapy. Among these drugs are two that have received approval from the Food and Drug Administration for treatment of mast cell tumors in dogs.

The ongoing shortages of chemotherapeutic drugs on the human side also impact the veterinary side, Dr. Wright noted. Recently, three of five drugs for treatment of lymphoma were on back order for three months.

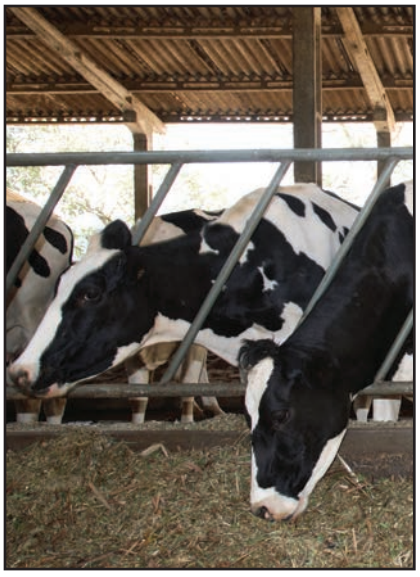
Oncology is not a field with one right answer, he said, but a field that lends itself to creativity.

"I view cancer research as the last frontier. We've explored Alaska, we've gone to the moon, but no one is curing cancer yet," Dr. Wright said. "I don't think I'm going to be that person, but it's really exciting to just play even a small part in this great process."

FDA restricting antimicrobial uses in livestock

The Food and Drug Administration is giving drug companies three years to end the use of many antimicrobials to promote livestock growth or similarly improve production.

Although agency officials said they are asking that pharmaceutical companies voluntarily eliminate



such uses for antimicrobials that are deemed important for human medicine, they announced in December 2013 that they will consider regulatory action against those who do not comply. With pharmaceutical industry cooperation, antimicrobials considered important for human medicine could be administered to livestock only to treat, control, or prevent a specific disease, and would be distributed only through prescriptions or veterinary feed directives, which are similar to prescriptions.

On Dec. 11, 2013, the FDA gave pharmaceutical companies 90 days to tell the agency whether they will comply with the request. Michael Taylor, FDA deputy commissioner of foods and veterinary medicine, said that, between the 90-day deadline on March 12 and the three-year removal deadline, the agency will evaluate drug industry participation and decide whether to start regulatory proceedings.

The FDA provided a list showing that the change would affect about 290 drug approvals used in making 420 products.

"I want to emphasize that what's voluntary here is only the participation of animal pharmaceutical companies," Taylor said. "Once these labeling changes have been made, animal producers will only be able to use these products with therapeutic reasons with veterinary oversight.

"The two companies that hold the majority of these approvals, Zoetis and Elanco, have already declared their support and commitment to voluntarily removing these production claims from their products."

Both companies issued statements confirming that they support the changes planned by the FDA.

Dr. William T. Flynn, deputy director for science policy in the FDA Center for Veterinary Medicine, said most of the antimicrobial uses targeted for changes involve products administered to livestock through feed. About 25 companies own the affected drug approvals, which cover products such as tetracycline, penicillin, and macrolide drugs.

But Dr. Flynn said antimicrobials in some drug classes, such as ionophores, will remain available over the counter, because they have no clinically important uses in human medicine.

Dr. Flynn also said that the three-year phase-out period is partly intended to give agriculture industries time to adjust their production methods as they move away from the use of affected drugs and develop alternatives to antimicrobial use.

The FDA announced the changes with the publication of a guidance document, Guidance for Industry No. 213, on how the agency wants drug companies to ensure antimicrobial products are used appropriately in food-producing animals. The agency had published a draft version of the guidance document in April 2012, along with a final version of another antimicrobial use document, Guidance for Industry No. 209, which provides more information for agriculture industries.

Along with the new guidance document, the FDA published proposed changes to the rules governing veterinary feed directives. Those changes are intended to give veterinarians more flexibility in issuing VFDs.

Rather than requiring a veterinarian-client-patient relationship to issue VFDs, the proposed rules state that veterinarians must issue them in compliance with state and professional requirements. In addition, the FDA would remove an automatic drug categorization rule that otherwise could obstruct the supply chain, and the agency would reduce the amount of time veterinarians and others must keep VFD records from two years to one.

Dr. Christine Hoang, an assistant director in the AVMA Scientific Activities Division, said the AVMA appreciates the FDA's efforts, intentions, and considerations to increase veterinarian oversight of antimicrobials.

"We are fully supportive of this move from over the counter to VFD," she said.

The FDA is accepting comments on the VFD rule changes under docket number FDA-2010-N-0155 at www.regulations.gov.

AVMA

The Conversation: AVMA seeks to promote intraprofessional dialogue about animal welfare issues

Public concern over the treatment of animals has been growing for decades. Long-accepted practices of animal husbandry and use are being challenged, particularly in the areas of agriculture, research, and entertainment. People are more sympathetic to the view that animals are not "things" but sentient creatures whose interests are worthy of equal consideration.

In 2008, the AVMA Executive Board staked out a position opposing ear cropping and tail docking in dogs for cosmetic reasons. Four years later, the board supported federal legislation requiring larger housing for millions of layer hens. The board explained in both instances it was acting in the best interests of the animals. And, while many veterinarians agreed with the AVMA, others did not.

Animal welfare is a complex, emotion-laden field prone to contentiousness. As the previous examples of ear cropping and tail docking in dogs and housing of layer hens demonstrate, veterinarians aren't immune to disagreements over what constitutes good welfare. At times when such infighting spills into the public arena, the veterinary profession's message and image as animal welfare leaders can be compromised, however.

With a goal of managing future intraprofessional conflicts, the AVMA

recently brought a select group of some 150 veterinarians with diverse professional backgrounds to Chicago to add to their animal welfare knowledge as well as learn problem-solving and consensus-building skills.

The conference, titled "Can You Hear Me Now? The Conversation," was held Nov. 14-15, 2013, and featured a group of internationally renowned veterinarians, animal scientists, and ethicists who spent the first day presenting the scientific, social, political, market, and legal aspects of how and why animal welfare decisions are made. The next day, attendees split into small groups to conduct welfare assessments on captive elephant handling; feral and owned free-roaming cats; housing for egg-laying hens and feral horses; and the use of rats in multiple sclerosis research.

"This was not a conversation between veterinarians and the general public. This was a conversation between veterinarians and other veterinarians," Dr. J. Bruce Nixon, chair of The Conversation Working Group, explained. He said this group was restricted to veterinarians because they need to learn how to discuss these things internally before turning to external discussions.

One of the architects of The Conversation, AVMA Immediate Past President Douglas G. Aspros, said animal welfare issues have been among the most contentious he's dealt with as an Executive Board member. His vision for the conference was to bring together AVMA members with diverse professional backgrounds to start a dialogue about how veterinarians can, together, advance animal welfare, despite differences in professional responsibilities and perspectives.

Several speakers highlighted the inherent tensions of a profession that cares for animals but also facilitates the responsible use of animals to satisfy human interests and needs. Those tensions are nowhere more evident than in laboratory animal medicine. Dr. Steven Niemi, director of the Office of Animal Resources at Harvard University, put it this way: "Laboratory animal medicine is a hard field and is probably the hardest to handle in the entire veterinary profession. We're the only ones who intentionally inflict pain on animals for a higher good."

Dr. Aspros believes learning how to disagree while remaining unified is critical not only to the AVMA as an organization but to the veterinary profession as well. "It's very important for AVMA to continue to be the big tent," he said. "It's important organizationally, but it's also important for the profession as a whole to have a unified, strong voice. Nobody else in the profession can play that role."

Some members have suggested the AVMA should be a resource on animal welfare science and no longer take a position on whether a particular practice is good or bad. Dr. Aspros disagrees, saying veterinarians shouldn't forfeit their role as animal welfare leaders. "At the end of the day, if we want to be a constructive part of that conversation with society, we can't hide behind science. Science informs decisions; it doesn't make decisions," he said.

The Conversation Working Group is exploring the option of condensing the lectures and welfare assessments into a "mini The Conversation" format for veterinary colleges and associations.

AVMA fellows' placements announced

In late October 2013, the AVMA announced that its three 2013-2014 Congressional Science Fellows had accepted appointments in the offices of Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand of New York, Rep. Sanford Bishop of Georgia, and Sen. Dick Durbin of Illinois.

During their yearlong assignments, the fellows will use their scientific expertise and training in veterinary medicine to advise their respective members of Congress on a variety of policy issues, including agriculture, animal health and welfare, appropriations, food safety, biosecurity, and public health.

Dr. Eric Deeble of Philadelphia will concentrate on food safety and animal agriculture issues in Sen. Gillibrand's office. He is a 2013 graduate of the University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine and a former AVMA GRD extern. He has worked internationally in China, Africa, and the Near East examining issues of food animal production in low-resource communities, animal transport, and international market development.

Dr. Nathaniel Tablante of Elkridge, Md., will concentrate on an agriculture portfolio, with a focus on poultry issues, in Rep. Bishop's office. He is a 1976 graduate of the University of the Philippines and an associate professor and extension poultry veterinarian at the Virginia-Maryland Regional College of Veterinary Medicine. Dr. Tablante has more than 20 years' experience in poultry health management, epidemiology, and biosecurity, and has authored and co-authored many articles and educational materials on these topics.

Dr. Kate Varela of Medford, N.Y., will concentrate on public health, conservation, climate, and education in Sen. Durbin's office. She is a 2012 graduate of the University of Illinois College of Veterinary Medicine and most recently worked at a small animal practice near Chicago. Dr. Varela is completing a Master of Public Health in Health Policy and Administration with a concentration in global health and is interested in agricultural policy development.

The fellows were selected in April 2013 from 30 applicants who completed a three-phase, competitive selection process. They will serve until August 2014 as full-time employees with their members of Congress, supporting the needs and activities of their respective congressional offices. They are not AVMA employees or lobbyists.

The AVMA Congressional Science Fellowship program receives funding from the American Veterinary Medical Foundation and is sponsored through the American Association for the Advancement of Science, which works to place scientists in congressional offices where there is a need.

Board approves policy changes for pet food, microchips

The AVMA is advocating for veterinarian involvement in the distribution of pet foods that make health claims.

The AVMA Executive Board approved that position in November 2013 as well as voted to adopt or modify policies on a variety of subjects, including pet microchips, pet health insurance, and aquaculture regulation. AVMA policies are available at www.avma.org/kb/policies.

Board members voted to amend AVMA policy to recommend that the Food and Drug Administration restrict access to cat and dog foods that make health claims but have not gone through the drug approval or efficacy assurance process. The change added the word "therapeutic" to the title of the AVMA policy "Therapeutic Pet Food Health Claims" and added the following sentence to the policy: "In the interest of pet safety, AVMA recommends the FDA require the product to be made available to the public only through licensed veterinarians within the confines of a veterinarian-client-patient relationship."

In September 2012, the FDA said in a draft policy guide that the agency can regulate, as drugs, dog and cat foods used to diagnose, cure, mitigate, treat, or prevent disease. Even though many such foods are not approved as drugs, the FDA has exercised enforcement discretion on products that provide nutrition, that carry restricted label claims, and that are sold only through veterinarians in a veterinarian-client-patient relationship.

The AVMA had responded to the draft policy with a recommendation that the FDA require that pet foods with implied or explicit health or drug claims but no drug approval include statements on their labels that the claims have not been evaluated by the FDA. The comments also indicate the AVMA supports enforcement discretion on marketing of certain pet food additives, such as glucosamine, which is commonly used in managing osteoarthritis, that have not been associated with substantial safety concerns.

The FDA draft policy guide and comments are available at www.regulations.gov under docket number FDA-2012-D-0755.

The board members also edited the AVMA microchip use policy, which now provides more detail on where transponders should be placed and expresses support for the American Animal Hospital Association microchip database at www.petmicrochiplookup.org. The policy's new name is "Microchips: The Objectives and Key Elements Needed for Effective Electronic Identification of Companion Dogs, Cats, Other Small Mammals, Birds, Fish, Reptiles, Amphibians, and Equids."

The policy no longer expresses opposition to use of microchip registration databases as a source for marketing or referrals for products and services, a change recommended by the AVMA Council on Veterinary Service.

The AVMA also made the following policy approval and changes:

- Approved the policy "Uniform Jurisdiction for Aquatic Veterinary and Animal Health Programs," through which AVMA advocates that a single agency, rather than a mix of agriculture and wildlife agencies in state and federal governments, should have jurisdiction over the health of animals in aquaculture.
- Modified the policy "Pet Health Insurance" to state that a veterinarian should help in claims adjudication.
- Revised the policy "Veal Calf Management" to recognize industry progress toward moving calves into group housing at a younger age and to note the importance of attention to gastrointestinal health.
- Edited the policy "Service Animals" to reflect the inclusion of miniature horses in the Americans with Disabilities Act as well as to list more of the tasks performed by service animals.

The Executive Board members considered but decided against rescinding the policy "Controlled Substances Used in Euthanasia," which says controlled substances that are regulated by the Drug Enforcement Administration and used for euthanasia should be used only under the supervision of a veterinarian.

The Executive Board also voted against implementing a policy that would have said that valid scientific study shows lead from ammunition and fishing tackle can be toxic to animals.

AVMA supports research bills

The AVMA will advocate for bills intended to improve career opportunities for researchers in the biomedical sciences and to allow creation of charitable agricultural research organizations.

On the other hand, the AVMA will work to defeat a bill that would forbid nontherapeutic use in animals of antimicrobials deemed to be important for human medicine, with exceptions for uses deemed not to risk human health.

The AVMA Executive Board voted in November 2013 to take positions on 12 federal bills. The AVMA will spend the most effort toward passage of three and defeat of one.

Among them, the AVMA will work in support of the Next Generation Research Act, S. 1552, which would require efforts from the National Institutes of Health to improve opportunities for researchers, improve workforce diversity, and help researchers gain renewal funding. And the AVMA will work in support of the Charitable Agricultural Research Act, S. 1280 and H.R. 2671, which would allow tax-deductible charitable contributions to agricultural research organizations connected with certain universities and colleges.

But the AVMA will work for the defeat of the Preventing Antibiotic Resistance Act, S. 1256, which would reduce the use in livestock of antimicrobials deemed to be important for human medicine. The bill would make the Food and Drug Administration withdraw drug approvals that allow uses of such antimicrobials in livestock in the absence of a documented disease or infection.

The FDA could make exceptions for uses determined unlikely to harm human health through increased antimicrobial resistance development.

The bill also states that a veterinarian-client-patient relationship should exist when livestock receive antimicrobials considered to be important in human medicine.

In a recommendation that the AVMA pursue defeat of the bill, the AVMA Legislative Advisory Committee indicated to board members that four other AVMA councils and committees supported the requirement for a veterinarian-client-patient relationship but still opposed the bill. The recommendation said the bill would eliminate the use of some antimicrobials for disease prevention and control without scientific review by the FDA and that drug use safeguards already exist within the veterinary profession and drug approval process.

The AVMA also will express support for the following bills but expend less effort toward passage:

- The Strategies to Address Antimicrobial Resistance Act, H.R. 2285, which would create a new Department of Health and Human Services office to coordinate and plan efforts to combat resistance, study antimicrobial use, and make resistance-related recommen dations.
- The Wounded Warrior Service Dog Act of 2013, H.R. 2847, which would establish a grant program to encourage assistance dog use by disabled military veterans.

The Executive Board adopted a position of "nonsupport" for the Pet Safety and Protection Act of 2013, H.R. 2224, which would restrict who could sell dogs and cats to research facilities and would effectively prohibit sales of random-source dogs and cats from class B dealers. The board's position means the AVMA opposes the bill but does not consider action against it to be a priority.

Board tweaks approach to member services, ethics

The AVMA is taking a new tack in how it addresses the areas of member services and veterinary ethics.

The Executive Board approved sunsetting the AVMA Member Services Committee in July 2014 but is seeking to preserve two MSC objectives—promoting diversity in the profession and wellness among veterinary professionals. The board also approved continuing the AVMA Judicial Council on an ad hoc basis, which will enable the council to complete revisions to the Principles of Veterinary Medical Ethics of the AVMA.

The board took the actions during its November 2013 meeting, following in-depth performance evaluations of the MSC and Judicial Council by the AVMA Governance Performance Review Committee.

According to the governance committee, the charge of the MSC is too broad.

Dr. Douglas G. Aspros, AVMA immediate past president, said sunsetting the MSC does not mean that the Association is inattentive to member services, but rather, is a response to the fact that the functions of the committee are being addressed by others.

The work of the Judicial Council is limited, according to the governance committee. The council's responsibilities include investigating unethical conduct by AVMA members and advising on questions of veterinary ethics. The committee concluded that ad hoc committees, staff, and existing AVMA entities could fulfill the council's responsibilities.

AVMA collaborating with women's initiative

The AVMA Executive Board in November 2013 approved establishing a collaboration with the Women's Veterinary Leadership Development Initiative as a pilot program for 2014, with the AVMA offering a range of resources to support the growth of the initiative.

Formed in July 2013, the WVLDI is a grassroots organization that seeks to bridge the gender gap in the leadership of the veterinary profession. As of Nov. 12, 2013, the organization's Facebook group had 557 members, and its LinkedIn group had 225 members. Members of the WVLDI Advisory Board have begun to make presentations at veterinary conferences.

The AVMA will provide the WVLDI with resources such as financial and business management services, sponsorship for WVLDI speakers to make presentations at four veterinary conferences, and co-branded promotion of these presentations. The AVMA associate director for international and diversity initiatives will serve on the WVLDI Advisory Board.

The WVLDI website is at www.womenveterinarians.org.

AVMA to help members travel to Havana

The AVMA plans to provide information and planning help for veterinarians who want to attend the 2014 Pan-American Congress of Veterinary Sciences meeting in Cuba.

AVMA staff members plan to give nonmonetary aid to members who need help obtaining travel documentation and arranging charter flights and accommodations in Havana for the October meeting. The AVMA Executive Board voted in November 2013 in favor of providing the service, as recommended by the AVMA Committee on International Veterinary Affairs.

The AVMA is a member of the Pan-American Association of Veterinary Sciences, which is among the organizations sponsoring the congress. Dr. Beth Sabin, AVMA associate director for international and diversity initiatives, said the AVMA wants to make sure its members know about the congress, which offers an opportunity to attend continuing education sessions and meet colleagues from throughout the Americas.

The committee indicated in its recommendation to the board that the AVMA could start providing information and other services for members who want to participate in international meetings, and the meeting in Havana could serve as a good trial for such a service, considering the restrictions on U.S. citizens' travel to Cuba.

The Department of the Treasury indicates U.S. citizens can apply for licenses to travel to Cuba to attend professional meetings or conferences organized by international professional organizations based outside the U.S.

Information on the Pan-American congress is available at www.panvetcuba.com. The AVMA had not yet produced additional resources on the event by press time, but questions can be sent to Dr. Sabin at *esabin@avma.org*.

Issues

Drugs, regulation in horse racing discussed on Capitol Hill

Once again, Congress is eyeing implementing reforms in North American horse racing, but, this time, it's looking to an outside organization to achieve changes.

A hearing was held Nov. 21, 2013, before the House Subcommittee on Commerce, Manufacturing, and Trade regarding the Horseracing Integrity and Safety Act of 2013 (S. 973/H.R. 2012), which would impose new restrictions on medication use in racehorses.

In May 2013, New Mexico Sen. Tom Udall and Pennsylvania Rep. Joe Pitts introduced the legislation. If enacted, it would designate the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency as the national and independent nongovernmental organization that would develop, maintain, and publish rules on medications used in racehorses. The rules would cover areas of drug withdrawal periods, approved treatments in the context of a veterinarian-client-patient-relationship, and prohibited substances and treatments.

Under the legislation, the USADA would also be charged with implementing programs relating to anti-doping education, research, testing, and adjudication to prevent any horse from participating in a race while under the effects of any substance or treatment that could affect its performance.

In addition, the bill seeks to end use of all race-day medication and includes a two-year phaseout for the use of Lasix (generic name furosemide) on race day. The only medications that currently can be given on race day are Lasix and other medications used to treat exercise-induced pulmonary hemorrhage, one of the most common medical problems affecting racehorses.

Courtesy of Horsephotos.com

Thoroughbreds racing at the Breeders' Cup Nov. 2, 2013, at Santa Anita Park, Calif.

The AVMA has yet to take a position on the legislation. However, in the previous Congress, the AVMA held a nonsupport position on similar legislation that sought to ban race-day medications. This is because of the direct conflict the legislation had with AVMA's policy on the Use of Therapeutic Medications in Racehorses, which supports the use of furosemide on race day for the treatment and prevention of EIPH, and mirrors the American Association of Equine Practitioners' policy on the subject.

AAEP Executive Director David Foley said the bill contains elements that are both in agreement with, and in opposition to, the AAEP's current policies on racehorse medication and industry regulation, but that ultimately, the AAEP cannot support the bill in its current form.

Foley also noted that the AAEP supports the movement currently within the horse racing industry itself to achieve uniform national medication guidelines.

To read the witnesses' prepared testimonies or watch video of the hearing, visit http://goo.gl/qFl9Bf.

Grants awarded for testing methods for food contaminants

The Food and Drug Administration awarded grants in September 2013 to seven members of the Veterinary Laboratory Investigation and Response Network to expand and validate testing methods for food contaminants.

The grant recipients are as follows:

- University of California-Davis, $99,000 annually for five years, for validation of methods to detect multiple toxicants in complex matrices including carbamate insecticides in feed and rumen contents, ricinine in liver, and penitrem A and roquefortine in stomach contents.
- Iowa State University, $99,000 annually for five years, for validation of methods to detect multiple chemical toxins in complex matrices: mycotoxins, antimicrobials, elements, and vitamins in blood, urine, and milk.
- University of Kentucky Research Foundation, $98,996 annually for five years, for validation of liquid chromatography–tandem mass spectrometry methods to detect a variety of anticoagulant rodenticide compounds and mycotoxins in animal tissues, biological fluids, and feeds.
- University of Pennsylvania, $99,000 annually for five years, for validation of methods to detect mycotoxins in complex animal feeds and animal tissues and biological fluids, by use of a handheld reader.
- South Dakota State University, $99,000 annually for five years, to conduct a multilaboratory validation of Applied Biosystems 7500 Fast Real-Time PCR System for detecting *Salmonella* organisms in raw pet food and mice droppings.
- Texas Agricultural Experiment Station, $90,351 annually for two years, to standardize and validate methods to detect *Campylobacter* species in feces of pet dogs and cats.
- Washington State University, $99,000 annually for five years, to identify, optimize, and validate analytic methods for determination of trace element and heavy metal contaminants in animal feeds, tissues, and veterinary diagnostic samples.

FDA veterinary advisory committee disbands

The Food and Drug Administration's Center for Veterinary Medicine announced Nov. 22, 2013, the disbanding of its Veterinary Medicine Advisory Committee, a group of outside experts retained as special government employees to offer opinions on animal drug and food issues. Instead, the FDA says it will continue to use other forums to seek expert and public opinion on regulatory matters.

"CVM believes that the VMAC is no longer necessary because of other opportunities for input; the last VMAC

meeting was in 2010 and the committee has met only six times in the last decade. CVM has held several other public meetings on specific regulatory issues in the same time period. For example, the center is currently taking part in an open public meeting on the proposed Preventive Controls for Animal Food rule under the Food Safety Modernization Act, and earlier in 2013 held five listening sessions around the country on the issue of antimicrobial resistance in animal agriculture. Additionally, CVM encourages public input through the Federal Register on proposed rules, draft guidance documents for industry, and other calls for public comment," according to an FDA press release.

The committee was formed April 24, 1984, to review and evaluate available data concerning safety and effectiveness of new animal drugs, feeds, and devices for use in the treatment and prevention of animal diseases and increased animal production. A Nov. 22, 2013, Federal Register notice declared the committee was terminated on Sept. 24, 2013.

Community

Expanded Kansas diagnostic lab opens

Kansas State University's Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory opened its second site, on the K-State Olathe campus, Nov. 15, 2013. The new Microbial Surveillance Lab was funded partly by Merck Animal Health, though officials declined to give an amount.

The Olathe lab is accredited by the American Association of Veterinary Laboratory Diagnosticians and has been established to provide microbiology diagnostic support to animal health pharmaceutical and biological companies.

Initially, the lab will provide diagnostic support services to meet the needs of Merck, and it is anticipated that other animal health industry partners in the Animal Health Corridor will follow.

Courtesy of Kansas State University

Dr. Brian Lubbers, director of the Microbial Surveillance Lab, said, "The location at the K-State Olathe campus was chosen because of connectivity to animal health companies in the Kansas City area, and the campus had available space that met the needs of the diagnostic laboratory and its unique clientele."

The lab will also create student educational and training programs, using a specialized caseload.

"Thanks to Merck, this offers a new platform for us to more easily provide diagnostic services and professional expertise to the Kansas City region, Animal Health Corridor, and beyond," said Dr. Ralph C. Richardson, dean of KSU's College of Veterinary Medicine, in the release.

Olathe Microbial Surveillance Lab services are provided by contract only. Routine diagnostic submissions will continue to be directed to the K-State Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory on the Manhattan campus.

Tufts receives $24 million grant from NIH

The Tufts Clinical and Translational Science Institute in Boston was named a recipient of the 2013 National Institutes of Health's Clinical and Translational Science Award. Tufts CTSI first received federal funding in 2008. The new award provides more than $24 million in federal funding to support the institute's work over the next five years.

The Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine at Tufts University is an integral member of Tufts CTSI, and it will continue its role to drive one-health issues, said Dr. Dean Deborah T. Kochevar, in a university press release.

"A one health committee is being developed within Tufts CTSI that will bring together the institute's diverse partners to share knowledge on human and animal health," she said in the release.

Tufts CTSI facilitates the translation of laboratory research into clinical use, medical practice, and health policy. It has supported clinical trials, laboratory research, study design, pilot studies funding, and career development for its investigators. The institute's partners include 12 Tufts schools and research centers, 10 Tufts-affiliated hospitals, three additional academic institutions, nine community-based organizations, and five industry partners.

For more information on the award, visit http://goo.gl/1URo8f or www.tuftsctsi.org.