

ASSOCIATION UNVEILS FUTURE STRATEGY...

THE delegate list for last month's BCVA congress – including veterinary surgeons, researchers, students and exhibitors – totalled nearly 600.

The Majestic Hotel in Harrogate was fully booked from way back, the dinners had a waiting list and the message is that for BCVA 2014 (see below) register early.

The president, Jonathan Statham, spent little time in looking backwards over his year of office and addressed an important topic with a full paper, "BCVA – future strategy", highlighting that cattle veterinary practice is evolving rapidly, that new business models are emerging and that the attitude of government to livestock farming and food production is in a Treasury-led transition.

The theme for the BCVA has been to promote the pivotal role of cattle veterinary surgeons in food security and two major activities are dominating the future: to represent the views of members in the wider livestock industry and to signpost lifelong learning for cattle practitioners.

The development of Animal Health England/UK is gaining momentum. This is expected to be a major initiative for the coming months and years with the emphasis on the control of endemic diseases. Successful models are available to be studied from Australia and Ireland. These initiatives operate with a buy-in from all those influencing animal food production with veterinary surgeons at the hub. More details were highlighted in later disease-related presentations.

Jonathan spoke enthusiastically about the lifelong learning and education packages that have been developed and are now operational. The programme reaches from undergraduate clinical clubs to encompass the whole of the working life of a cattle vet through to retirement.

An "Advanced Practitioners" programme has RCVS recognition that links with the CertAVP modules offered by the Liverpool and Edinburgh schools. Practical workshops based at veterinary schools and farms will complement online learning.

The opportunity to take advantage of the programme will be available to all cattle vets, whether enrolled for further education qualifications or not. Five years of course dates have been published and are available by e-mail from office@cattlevet.co.uk.

The specialist or experienced practitioner is offered the Masterclass programme in which international

opinion leaders are being engaged to share their knowledge. Two webinars on dairy nutrition and bull fertility are currently available; requests for topics are growing and anyone interested in taking part or looking for particular topics to be included is invited to contact the BCVA office.

For some years workshops have been running for new graduates entering cattle practice and for those returning from involvement overseas or needing to update their skills and awareness. Foundation courses have built on past efforts and are offered to

RICHARD GARD
reports from the congress of the
British Cattle Veterinary Association
held in Harrogate last month

support cattle vets in developing progressive core clinical skills and knowledge.

The four continuous streams at the congress and the questions and discussions that followed the presentations indicate that many practices are looking for the means to infiltrate the technical information into the situation with their particular practice requirements. This is clearly not an easy process and learning from others' successes and failures accelerates disease control initiatives.

One of the recognised problems for cattle practices is the attrition rate with younger vets. There is no shortage of new graduates wanting to enter cattle practice but after a few years too many move into companion animal medicine or industry with better pay and conditions. A fresh perspective on current veterinary business and career progression is needed "to provide younger vets and older vets with a sustainable career in practice", Mr Statham said.

CVO face questions

The four CVOs – Christianne Glossop (Wales), Bert Houston (Northern Ireland), Alick Simmons (England deputy CVO) and Sheila Voas (Scotland) – formed a panel to answer questions in a session hosted by Andrew Taylor. The questions were pre-submitted and appeared on the screens in the large conference hall.

■ *How can we work in partnership with Government to deliver endemic disease surveillance?* The responses included recognising the need for a shared interest in surveillance, the option of subsidy for the gathering of data (as with the Highlands & Islands veterinary scheme), the need for a network of knowledgeable vets and adequate numbers of practices for surveillance and needing to recognise

the confidentiality of farmer's information.

■ *Do you consider that vets working in practice are in partnership with Government and if so what will that partnership look like in two years time?* The top priority

for Wales is bTB eradication with the veterinary surgeon in practice at the heart of control providing support at the start of a breakdown and offering advice. The view for England is to question what the objective is for a partnership and to be clear that the Government spend on animal health is expected to shrink. Scotland recognises that a smaller Government veterinary service has to rely on veterinary practices for support and Northern Ireland similarly believes that successful relations within the industry is the way forward. All agreed that Government and practices will need to work together.

■ *Do you believe that bTB should be considered as a separate element to endemic disease in the UK?* It is recognised that bTB is a huge drain on resources and emotions and has a huge economic impact (England) and it is necessary to think dispassionately of the costs of intervening with a need to work in a multidisciplinary manner in the assessment of disease risk. In Wales 75% of the budget is spent on bTB and this eclipses other effort: the principles are the same for all disease and we need a working model for the future. The additional comment from Northern Ireland was that bTB is seen as a government disease. The Scottish view is that some farmers are not taking bTB seriously and it should be treated as an exotic disease.

There was considerable discussion about the future over-supply of veterinary graduates with new vet schools coming on stream. Various contributions from the panel and from delegates outlined wider opportunities for vets outside practice and over-supply was not seen as a problem, although there are difficulties in recruiting staff for the schools.

The most heated debate concerned a question about the decoupling of prescribing from dispensing. There is increasing interest (England) in the way medicines are prescribed and used and scrutiny of the profession and the livestock industry is expected to increase. Vets are in a good position (Northern Ireland) to advise on the best use of antibiotics but prescribing and recording is not always what it should be. The comment from Scotland that practices should change from relying on medicine sales



Steve Headon (left) and Sophie Davies of The Moore Scarrott Partnership receive the best stand award at the BCVA congress from David Kimberley of Veterinary Practice.

received a strong reaction from the floor that cattle practices had already moved on.

The role of individual funding initiatives to allow vets and farmers to work together for better disease control was welcomed but the overall view was that these should be channelled into an overall strategy. The new Animal Health & Welfare framework for Wales is being developed, with priorities for the future. Disease is not necessarily linked to welfare (Scotland) and vets should be pressing (Northern Ireland) to take up the role as trusted adviser.

The role of the Animal Health Board was considered a step change (England) and follows the theme of "What are you going to do rather than what will someone else do." The cost of endemic disease has to be set against other priorities with conflicting demands on the budget.

Officers and prizes

The president of BCVA is now Declan O'Rourke with Gareth Hateley the junior vice-president.

The President's Prize was awarded to Professor Martin Sheldon of Swansea University for his paper on *Future concepts in combating uterine disease depend on understanding the mechanisms of infection and immunity*. Peter Edmondson of the Shepton Veterinary Group received the Tuckey Award for his paper on *Responsible use of antibiotics in dairy practice*.

Jessica Quinlan from the Nottingham veterinary school won a Kindle Fire, sponsored by Forum, for completing a treasure hunt around the trade exhibition. The best trade stand award went to The Moore Scarrott Partnership, whose stand included a continuous video of the best 101 tries scored by England, which was elatedly watched by many delegates.

■ The 2014 BCVA congress will be from 14th to 16th October at Hinckley Island Hotel in Leicestershire.