

# Newsletter

## Volume 5

### may 2002

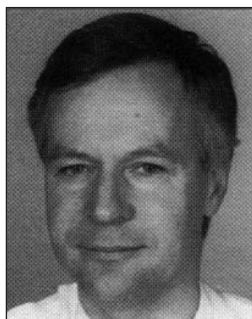
# ECVS



#### European College of Veterinary Surgeons

Dept. of Veterinary Surgery, University of Zurich, Winterthurerstrasse 260 CH-8057 Zurich Switzerland  
Tel. 41-1-635 8408 or 1 313 0383 Fax. 41-1-313 03 84 e-mail: mgaovet@vetchir.unizh.ch

## From the Presidents pen



*By Wim Klein, President  
of the ECVS*

Dear Fellow  
Diplomates

I Hope you are enjoy-  
ing the spring. Looking  
around, I see young  
ducklings swimming

around our houseboat. But the herons are hun-  
gry after the Winter and very happy with a lit-  
tle snack, so the rise in the duck population  
will be a little delayed. Life is not always easy.

Maybe the exam candidates feel like these little  
ducks, but they should realise, that the exam-  
iners are not like herons. They are not there to  
eat you, but to help you get access to the  
College. It is in the interest of the College to  
increase the number of Diplomates, without  
lowering the standards of course.

We are happy to see, that there is great inter-  
est to sit the exam: this year there will be more  
than 40 examinees. Our College continues to  
grow, but if we compare this to the number of  
new Diplomates last year in the USA, it is clear  
that we won't be comparable in size in the  
near future. We are working hard to be com-  
parable in quality and we hope to convince  
the ACVS that we are approaching their stan-

dards. There are some rumours that acceptance  
of reciprocity is not as far away as it has been  
in the past. It would offer ECVS Diplomates a  
broader work area if they would be allowed to  
supervise ACVS residents. We will ask the  
ACVS, which steps have to be taken to gain  
the stature of reciprocity. The ACVS is well  
aware of our standards because they were since  
the beginning involved in our exam. Our next  
step is to send next year's chairs of the ECVS  
exam committee to the meeting where the  
American exam is being prepared. We are glad  
that ACVS is willing to allow them to attend  
the examiner's meeting in San Diego in  
October as observers.

The College is slowly moving away from  
reliance on alternative training programmes.  
Six new training programmes have been  
approved, 3 at universities and 3 in private  
practices. We are moving in the right direction:

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the quality of education of residents can be better guaranteed if a Standard Resident Programme has been followed. The number of places, where this is possible, is increasing.

The next meeting of the European Board of Veterinary Specialisation (EBVS) will be held in April in Brussels. One of the items on the agenda is the proposed move to species based colleges instead of discipline based colleges. Both the chair of the board Marc Balligand and I as president will attend this meeting and defend our position. We will report on this meeting at the Annual Business Meeting of the ECVS in Vienna.

The programme of the Annual Scientific Meeting in Vienna has been finalised – thanks to the extensive efforts of the Programme Committee and Monika in the ECVS office. More than 70 abstracts have been evaluated. We will have a great programme with many interesting topics.

I look forward to seeing you all in July in the wonderful city of Vienna.

## From the chair's corner



*By Marc Balligand,  
Chair of the Board of  
Regents*

Chèr(e)s Collègues  
Diplomates,

The sun is generously  
shining on Belgium,  
these last days.

Hopefully, you can enjoy it as well.

The present conflict in the Middle-East reminds us all that without courage, forgiveness, sincerity, trust and tolerance, peace can only be a dream in this world. What is true between peoples is also true between persons. In fact, large conflicts often find their roots in repeated small quarrels. Let's behave in our

families and communities in such a way, that peace always gets a chance.

As chair of our College, I have presided the winter Board Meeting in Lenzburg, January 12 to 13. Our treasurer, Hugo Schmoekel, presented the financial results of our last Annual Meeting in Velbert, Germany. The meeting itself was a success, but the Forum with the intended goal of providing a healthy profit, made a loss almost equal to the profit of the Meeting. We have largely missed our target. Thus we still lack the means to fully support our office in Zurich. Our independence from the AO Group, which in my point of view, should be aimed at to become a full grown association, has been further delayed. I personally regret it. Nevertheless, we must be thankful to AO for continuing to support us. This issue pushed the Board to reconsider the location of Velbert as a suitable place for our Meeting/Forum in 2003. Based on the evaluation forms from last year, indicating a wish not to return to Velbert but keep to the Forum, Glasgow (UK) and a one-day practitioner meeting as Forum are presently contemplated.

The main topic addressed during the Board Meeting in Lenzburg was the report of the Credentials Committee (CC). The Board decided to alter some of their recommendations, i.e. accepted more candidates to sit the exams than proposed by the CC. This action has concerned the CC. I want to say the following: The Board warmly thanks the members of all committees and in particular those of the CC (David, Ulrich, John, Astrid, Lennart and Hans) for the great job they do for the benefit of the College. However, it has to be clearly stated again, the Board of Regents is the ONLY executive organ of ECVS. It is composed of eleven individuals (many more than any committee), elected by the Diplomates. A « feeding » system of two in and two out every year allows renewal yet guarantees a continuum in our policy. Nevertheless, the fact of a dispute clearly indicates the need for more communication and possibly clarifications in the Book of Procedures. Members of the Board have personally contacted members of the CC. To help

clarify the situation, the Board and the CC will meet in Vienna. The General Assembly will be informed of the situation and will exert its legislative privilege if required.

Another matter of concern has been the supervision of residents by our diplomates. ECVS acknowledges the right of every Diplomate to supervise young colleagues in training. It must be remembered though that conditions are specified. 1st : A training programme must be put together by the supervisor and accredited by the College: this is going fairly well as 52 programmes (42 Standard and 10 Alternate) are presently listed in 35 Universities and 17 private Practices; 2d : one Diplomate is allowed to supervise a maximum of three residents at a time during the whole programme. This has led to some misunderstanding. Although the Board supports and thanks those who devote time and energy to the training of youngsters, yet it may have to curb the over enthusiasm of some others. Contacts are being made to clarify some questionable situations.

The recertification issue did not occupy us very long. A summary sheet for each candidate's achievements will be designed by our office. Documents of proof (certificate of attendance at meetings, 1st page of published papers, congress programmes with speaker's name and topic) will have to be provided in addition to an updated CV.

The Public Relation Committee (PRC) report underlined some ongoing confusion regarding the tasks attributed to PRC especially in advertising the meetings.

After further clarification, the solution is under way.

Our colleague and Board member Chris Bellenger from Ireland has been proposed by the Nominating Committee as candidate for President-elect. Wim Back (NL/LA), John Walmsley (UK/LA), John Houlton (UK/SA) and Rafaël Nickel (GERM/SA) are proposed as candidates for the two regent positions. I warmly thank these colleagues for agreeing to run for

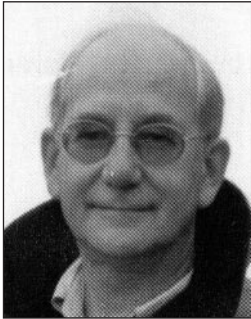
these positions. ECVS is what you all are but particularly what its representatives and committee members are. The last word will be given by the General Assembly in Vienna.

This is it, cher(e)s collègues Diplomates. After the next Board Meeting in Vienna, I shall leave my position to my friend Wim Klein. I shall have served 4 years in the Examination Committee and three years in the Board. I am perfectly aware of my numerous shortcomings during those years. I was like most of you particularly busy, trying with difficulties to reconcile a demanding professional live with a not less demanding private one. How can one in the same time write a paper, fix a fracture, give a lecture, cherish a wife, play with kids, walk the dog and ... hunt ?. Well nobody can probably and I am just like everybody. Yet my experience is that when there is no time left, there is still some time. And our dear College is worth that time. As we say in French : à bon entendeur, salut !. And don't forget the communication.

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## Elections 2002

**B**ecause of last year's Business Meeting decisions, the Constitution was changed – we shall vote this year the first time by written mail in ballot. We hope to get very high turnout on votes for the President-elect and the two Regent positions. For President-elect we can offer you only one candidate – but an outstanding one: Chris Bellenger. On the other hand we were lucky to find two candidates each for the large animal and small animal Regents positions. Please remember to vote only for one of the large and small animal nominees, respectively. The ballot will be invalid, if the two nominees for small animal Regent are marked and none of the large animal Regents. We urge you turn in your ballots immediately after you receive them, so you do not forget it. Remember the deadline, when the ballots HAVE to be in Zürich at the latest: June 15th, 2002 LET'S VOTE!



## **Nominee for President Elect (one nominee only): Chris Bellenger**

Professor **Christopher Bellenger** BVSc MVB PhD FACVSc FRCVS DipECVS has been Professor of Veterinary Surgery and Head, Department of Veterinary Surgery at University College Dublin, National University of Ireland, Dublin since September 1995. He obtained his ECVS Diploma at the 1997 examinations and is currently completing the third year of his appointment as a Regent of the College.

Chris Bellenger graduated in veterinary science (BVSc) from the University of Sydney in 1967 and his PhD was conferred in 1976. He passed the examinations in Veterinary Surgery for the Fellowship of the Australian College of Veterinary Scientists in 1978. The Fellowship of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons was conferred on him in 1999 'for meritorious contributions to the literature'.

Before moving to Ireland Chris Bellenger worked at the University of Sydney, beginning as the most junior member of the Surgery Department, which was headed by his mentor the late Professor L H Larsen, and ending as Associate Professor of Veterinary Surgery and Head of the Department of Veterinary Clinical Sciences. He spent a year at Ontario Veterinary College, a year at the University of Bristol and other shorter periods overseas.

Animal patients over a 35-year working life have included cattle with genital tract problems, lame standardbred and thoroughbred horses and a full range of canines and felines. Small animals gradually became more and more predominant and since starting work in Dublin his clinical patient focus has been on soft tissue surgery of small animals.

Two main areas for research in Australia were osteoarthritis using a sheep meniscectomy model and clinical research in small animal gastrointestinal and general surgery areas. Numerous scientific articles and textbook chapters have been published.

At University College Dublin Chris Bellenger has leadership of a department comprising large and small animal surgeons, anaesthetists and imagers. Development of the department and its clinical, teaching, research and residency training programs, work on both the new undergraduate curriculum which commenced in 1999 and the new Veterinary Faculty buildings due for occupation in June 2002 and introduction of a new Diploma of Veterinary Nursing course have all been part of the job. It has been a challenging and exciting time working with Irish colleagues.

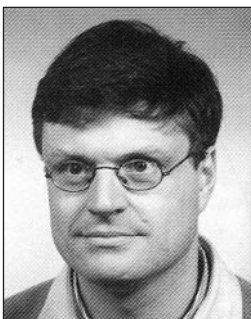
Chris Bellenger is married with four adult children. His wife Jan is a teacher of children with learning difficulties.

Living in Dublin has also provided opportunity to see some Six Nations Rugby and European opera and enjoy summer vacations at different Mediterranean locations.

## **Nominees for the Board of Regents:**

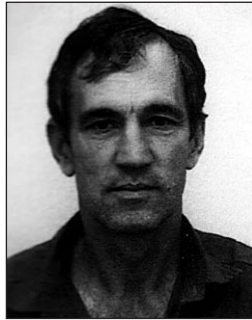
**Willem Back, John Houlton, Rafael Nickel, John Walmsley**

C.V.'s: Large animal nominees: (one will be elected)



**Willem Back** graduated met genoegen as a DVM from Utrecht University in 1987. After joining the Royal Dutch Airforce for two years, he became resident at the Department of General and Large Animal Surgery. In 1994 he was awarded Specialist in Equine Surgery for the Royal Netherlands Veterinary Association and in 1997 Diplomate of ECVS. His PhD thesis was entitled "The development of equine locomotion from foal to adult". In 2001 he edited together with Prof. Hilary Clayton the textbook "Equine Locomotion" (WB Saunders publishers). Currently, he is assistant professor at the Department of Equine Sciences, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, Utrecht. As staff surgeon he

has special interest in fracture repair and hoof orthopaedics, while he is supervisor of two ECVS residents. His research topics are mainly focussed on lower limb biomechanics and clinical genetics of orthopaedic diseases, while he supervises two PhD students. He is Past President of the Netherlands Equine Veterinary Association and Founding President of the Federation of European Equine Veterinary Associations. For ECVS he serves as Chairman of the Large Animal Exam Committee in 2002. He is married and has three children: two sons and one daughter.



**John Philip Walmsley**

Qualified Cambridge University 1968.  
Worked Wales, Cornwall, New Zealand, Australia, South Africa in mixed and equine practices.  
Started the Liphook practice in 1976.  
RCVS Certificate in Equine Orthopaedics 1985.  
Diploma in large animal surgery ECVS 1993.  
Full time surgeon and senior partner in specialist equine hospital practice.  
Member of the Veterinary Advisory Committee to the Horse Race Betting Levy Board.

Equine Veterinary Education Assistant Editor.

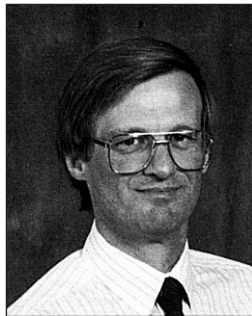
Member of UK Farrier's Examining Board.

Trustee of the British Equine Veterinary Association Trust.

Published EVJ, EVE, text books. Presented at ACVS, ECVS, BEVA, Bain Fallon Australia and several other European Equine meetings.

Member of Credentials Committee since summer 1999

**C.V.'s: Small animal nominees: (one will be elected)**



**John E F Houlton** qualified from the University of Cambridge in 1970 having gained a 1st Class Natural Science Degree in 1967. After 6 years in initially mixed and then small animal practice, he returned to Cambridge as University Assistant Surgeon to the late Colonel John Hickman. In 1980 he became University Surgeon, remaining in that post until 1997. At that time he joined the Veterinary Defence Society as a Claims Consultant and became a Consultant Orthopaedic Surgeon at Davies White, a small animal referral practice. He also became an Associate Lecturer at the University of Cambridge.

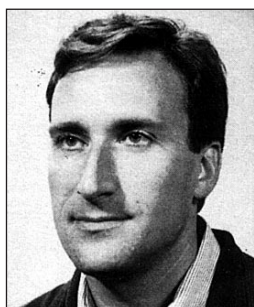
He is a Past Chairman of the British Veterinary Orthopaedic Association, Junior Vice President of the European Society of Veterinary Orthopaedics & Traumatology and President of AO/Vet. He is an RCVS Diplomate in Veterinary Radiology and in Small Animal Orthopaedics and a Diplomate of the European College of Veterinary Surgery. He has been an RCVS Specialist in Small Animal Orthopaedics since 1992 and was awarded the BSAVA Simon Award in 1985.

He has been an external examiner at the London, Liverpool and Dublin Veterinary Schools and has examined RCVS Certificate, Diploma and Fellowship candidates in small animal and equine orthopaedics. He is currently External Examiner for the Middlesex University Veterinary Nursing Degree and Senior Examiner of the RCVS Membership Examination. He was an Examiner for the ECVS for four years, being Chairman in 2000.

He has been a member of the BVA/KC Hip Dysplasia Panel since 1992 and is currently Chief Scrutineer of the Hip & Elbow Schemes.

He has taught on over 70 National and International Surgery Courses and is author or co-author of 50 peer reviewed papers, eleven book chapters and three books. He has also given over 200 presentations to National and International audiences.

In his spare time he is a keen supporter of village life, holding several Offices including Clerk to the Parish Meeting, and is an avid fan of working Labradors.



### **Rafael Nickel**

Graduated from Hannover Veterinary School (Tierärztliche Hochschule) 1983

Doctoral Thesis on Laserspectroscopy (Dr.med.vet.) 1986

Externship at TUFTS Veterinary School in Boston, Massachusetts, 1987

In private small animal practice in Germany 1988

Assistant professor in small animal surgery University of Utrecht, Netherlands, 1989-1997

Lecturer in surgery and urology University of Utrecht, Netherlands, 1991-1997

Diplomate of the European College of Veterinary Surgeons, 1993

President of the European Society of Veterinary Nephrology and Urology, 1993-1996

Ph.D. Thesis on urinary incontinence, University of Utrecht, 1998

Since 1997 in a private small animal referral hospital in Norderstedt, close to Hamburg, Germany

Member of the extended scientific program committees of the ESVIM congresses 1993-1996

Nomination committee of the ECVS 1993-1997

Organisation of the annual regional meeting of the German Small Animal Veterinary Association 2000 in Norderstedt and member of the scientific program committee of the FECAVA/DVG congress in Berlin 2000

Married to Christina Becker, DVM, Dr.med.vet., Ph.D.

Two children, Caja (4 years) and Felix (8 years)

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## **F**rom the ECVS Office:

*By Joerg Auer, Executive Secretary*

### **Velbert report**

Now, that all the numbers and the summary of the returned Meeting evaluation forms are together, we look back to the Velbert Meeting with mixed emotions. We can clearly say, that the quality of presentations was outstanding and that we achieved a new record for attendees. At the same time we had a new record for expenses, as outlined in the financial report. We also have to point out, that the forum was very well attended on the expense of the Annual Meeting Seminars, which clearly points out the competition between Forum and Annual Meeting. This was especially well demonstrated in the Combined Sunday Meeting on diagnostic imaging techniques in humans and animals, where only a hand full

of participants were present, despite the outstanding quality of the presentations. Most attendees were crammed in the Forum lectures. The Meeting facilities were adequate, except for the Small Animal Forum Lecture Room in the dungeons of the Forum Niederberg. Mr. Kiethe, the manager of the facility did his best and was very helpful in every way – a special thanks goes to him and his team. The problem of the decentralised lodging facilities will be addressed in the future, because the town decided to build a Congress Hotel next to the Forum Niederberg. All in all we can say, that Velbert could be an option in the future again, if the Congress Hotel is built and good public transportation to the airport in Düsseldorf are established.

## Vienna update

As you have found out in the mean time, the programme of the different Vienna Meetings were sent out. You were also able to convince yourself of the large variety of meetings and presentations which will be offered. The organisation committees have worked hard in assembling a well balanced Annual Meeting and various pre-congress activities. The facili-

ties at the Veterinary University of Vienna are superb and the social programme reflects the typical "charme" of Vienna. We are positive that the Meeting will be very successful. It goes without saying, that we hope to attract a large representative group of Diplomates in Vienna. Come and enjoy the special ECVS spirit in Vienna.

## Evaluation of the 1<sup>st</sup>. ECVS - Forum 2001 (Velbert)

Results of the questionnaire: 62 forms were returned

### How did you find out about the Forum?

Mailing list of ECVS: . . . 41  
Colleagues: . . . . . 12  
Journals: . . . . . 5  
Other: . . . . . 3  
(Gesellschaft für Pferdemedizin, ECVS Website, other)

### The meeting organisation was:

(Very good-1- , good-2-, average-3-, poor-4-): **2.13**

### How would you judge the usefulness and quality of the proceedings books?

(Very good-1- , good-2-, average-3-, poor-4-): **2.22**  
(remark: why German, English is official language)

### How would you judge the value for money?

(Very good-1- , good-2-, average-3-, poor-4-): **2.45**

### Is the Forum a valuable addition to the Annual Meeting of the ECVS?

(Yes-1-, not sure-2-, no-3-): **1.27**

### Should the ECVS Forum be repeated in 2003?

(Yes-1-, no-2-): **1.16**

### Length?: (1, 2 days) : **1.16 days**

**Location?** Velbert: 9, Germany: 14, other: 32  
(remarks/alternative: Spain, France, Greece, Lübeck, Hawaii, Brugge, U.K., Ireland, Berlin, Hamburg, better social options, near sea, near Hotel and airport, anywhere but not Velbert, facilities should meet requirements.)

### How would you judge the quality of the speakers?

(Very good-1- , good-2-, average-3-, poor-4-): **1.54**

### Were any speakers substandard?

Some specific names were listed, but for courtesy reasons are not published here.

### In which language should the Forum be held?

(English-1-, German-2-, Local language-3-): **1.16**

### List the topics the next Forum should consider:

**SA:** Auricular Sx; Endocrine Sx; Thoracic Sx(several requests); Cardiovascular Sx; Spinal Sx (several requests). Soft tissue traumatology; Shoulder Sx; Supracondylar femoral fx; Coxofemoral fx; Bone grafting; minimal invasive Sx.; Abdominal Sx.; Wound management; Airway Dx

**LA:** Laminitis; Navicular d.; Gastrointestinal Sx and P.O. management (several requests); Soft tissue Sx; Wound management; Lacerations; Diagnostic imaging; Laparoscopy; Tendon injuries; Fracture repair; Urogenital Sx.; Arthroscopy; Lameness Ex.; Dental Sx.; Shoeing; Hoofwall repair; Ophthalmic Sx.; Arthrodesis; Surgical complications; Foal Sx.; Standing horse surgical techniques.

**General remarks:** Better organisation; Better location; More coffee breaks; Define your goals: Continuing education-Forum?; Prevent overlap between speakers; Keep Forum parallel with Resident Forum day before Scientific meeting; Velbert is in the middle of nowhere; The audiosystems for the speakers were bad; Airconditioning is very important; The food was very good; Would like to have Forum proceedings; Monika is always excellent.

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## **F**inancial report 2001

*By Hugo Schmoekel, Treasurer*

The balance between expenses and income was approximately even in the year 2001. The College made a small profit of 6600 Euro. The actual expenses for the office, the exam and credential committees were covered by the corresponding fees.

The annual meeting in Velbert was financially successful and made a profit, which was offset by the loss of the Forum. The board analysed these facts and discussed the consequences for the future meetings.

The problem of running our own office without support from the University of Zurich and the AO Vet is still not solved. M. Balligand and the board explored different possibilities ( for example having our office in the facilities of the FVE with secretary support in Brussels), but the yearly cost of at least 50'000 Euro are prohibitive. The college can not afford this expense and so the office remains in Zurich.

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## **F**rom the Credential's Committee:

*By Ulrich Rytz, Credential's Committee*

The Credential Committee (CC) has again concluded a very busy evaluation year. A two day meeting was held to evaluate the progress of 116 standard residents and alternate trainees and 32 applications to sit the exam in July 2002.

Of the 32 final credentials applications, 7 were large animal candidates and 25 were small animal candidates. 8 were reapplications, 3 retro-active faculty endorsements and 21 new candidates of which 18 were standard residents and 3 alternate trainees.

13 candidates were approved to sit the exam in 2002. Two candidates were not accepted to sit

exams this year and encouraged to reapply and for 17 candidates an extended deadline to submit missing items was granted.

The most common problems encountered were failure to meet publication requirements and failure to complete all the training elements listed in the Training Brochure.

Although the number of residents is constantly increasing the evaluation procedure of the CC is becoming easier with the growing number of accepted residents in well structured programs and the introduction of a computerized evaluation system.

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## **F**rom the Examination Committee

*By Willem Back, Chair of the Large Animal Examination Committee*

### **Progress report Large Animal Examination Committee 2002**

The Examination Committee is now in the middle of it's preparation of the 2002 exam. The Written part has been changed from 5 to 4 possible answers per question, similar to ACVS procedures. Furthermore, the questions submitted by our fellow Diplomates have been incorporated in this year's exam as much as possible. The General part of the Written Exam was evaluated and the level of questions was equalised between Small and Large Animals. In this respect we have checked that all these questions refer to books and journals from the reading list, although for the bovine questions it appears to becoming more difficult to find suitable references within the given time period (last 5 years). We will continue to use bovine questions in the Parctical and Oral prts of the Exam. I would like to take the opportunity to thank ACVS for their support and exchange of information to keep our exam and examination procedure updated every year.

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## **F**rom the Public Relation Committee

*By Dirk Riemersma, Chair of the PR Committee*

It has been a busy time for the PR Committee. Announcements for the next meeting had been placed in several journals. A database of journals and organisations was updated; a never ending process, which still continues and keeps Rene van Weeren busy. Other members of the PRC are now working on updating the information brochure of the ECVS. Roland Perrin took charge of this challenge. And then there is the Newsletter, which goes into its fifth year of publication after Brigitte von Rechenberg took the initiative to publish the

first issue in 1998. Perhaps the Newsletter could play a role in improving communication between Diplomates and sharing the typical problems of a growing and maturing veterinary specialisation in various European countries. Jonathan Bray tells us about veterinary specialisation in the UK in this issue. His report may aid in understanding better the role of the ECVS and the responsibility of the Diplomates to achieve the goal of uniform and transparent high standard veterinary specialisation in Europe.

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## **T**he Status of Specialisation in the UK

*By Jonathan Bray, PR Committee*

I was asked to provide a quick overview on the status of specialisation in the UK. I have attempted to provide a review of the current state, and outline some of the challenges that are confronting us for the future. Although I have tried to consult my colleagues as widely as possible prior to writing this article, I cannot vouch that I am representing the views of the majority. Furthermore, I must admit to being a little naive as to activities of our large animal colleagues, and whether they share similar concerns to the small animal section. In the coming months, I hope to circulate a questionnaire to my UK colleagues, and anticipate this will provide a more accurate snapshot of the status quo. I shall present the results of that survey in coming issues.

The role of the specialist in the veterinary profession in the UK continues to mature. At last count, there were 41 ECVS Diplomates in the UK (20 SA: 21 LA), and 4 in Ireland (3 SA: 1 LA). These numbers will hopefully soon be

joined by the half-dozen or so candidates who are busy preparing for their examinations in July of this year. However, attainment of the DECVS does not immediately confer Specialist recognition by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons. This requires direct application to the RCVS, with support by three existing specialists. The applicant must hold an RCVS-approved Diploma (the DECVS was approved in 1998), and supply evidence of continued specialist activity if he/she is to acquire and maintain specialist status. Renewal is required every 5 years. As a result of this process, there are many Recognised Specialists working in the UK who are not part of the ECVS activities.

I have been away from the UK for the last three years, and one of the most significant changes during this period has been the considerable expansion and strengthening of the private referral sector. There are now a number of clinics that provide a multi-disciplinary service, in conjunction with Diplomates from other European Colleges. In other cases, solitary Diplomates provide their services from

within the umbrella of an existing first opinion practice. Without the encumbrance of teaching, and other traditional constraints of the University, the private clinics have very quickly captured their share of the referral market. The growth of these clinics has, in some cases, been quite spectacular, with an inevitable impact on the traditional suppliers of referral service, i.e. the Universities. This impact has been two-fold, including the loss of experienced staff to the private sector, and the loss of case material. The subsequent influence that these changes could have on the quality of residency training programmes within some schools needs to be watched carefully.

**A**lthough recent figures suggest that there has been a significant decline in the number of pets in human ownership over recent years, the demand for specialist services appears to show no sign of a similar decline. The status of the family pet in the UK household continues to climb, and more owners are prepared to turn to the specialist sector for the provision of advanced veterinary care for their pet. In the UK, there is no escaping the importance of the insurance market in financing a proportion of this demand. On average, about 60% of my clients are insured and many of these could not afford the treatment offered were it not for the insurance cover. Although more insurance companies are entering the pet market in the UK, ominous warnings are being voiced that the current vibrancy of this sector may not be sustained.

**C**ontinued development of the specialist sector will be dependant on the referral of cases from our first opinion colleagues. Although a proportion of our colleagues have embraced the positive aspects of referral, there is no question that a good number of vets in the UK either never consider the possibility of referral, or consider referral to be an admission of failure. Building an effective partnership will take time and education, but must be achieved for the long-term health of the profession as a whole. However, it must also be accomplished against a backdrop of declining pet ownership and a

need for the first opinion veterinarian to maintain income streams.

**A**lthough the veterinarian usually initiates referral, client pressure can play a role in some cases. However, there is still a large section of the animal-owning public who do not recognise the existence, or indeed the significance, of the veterinary specialist, and therefore do not actively seek referral. I think it is fair to say that many people still have view of the veterinary profession as portrayed by the James Herriot books. Sadly, the current plethora of television programmes on our screens does little to alter this view. The possibilities of specialist referral are rarely (if ever) discussed on screen, and the 'have-a-go//do-the-best-you-can' mentality remains a worrying feature of surgical management. Amazingly, the RCVS website makes no mention of specialists in its section on referral or second opinion, nor is veterinary specialisation discussed on its Visitors page.

**A** final, and perhaps most important challenge confronting the UK specialist relates to educational advancement of our colleagues. The last few years have seen a considerable increase in the number of vets wishing to obtain postgraduate Certificate-level qualifications in a chosen subject area. The RCVS Certificate qualification provides a path for the general practitioner to study and attain recognition of greater interest and knowledge within a particular field. Historically, and prior to the development of formal specialist recognition, many very talented Certificate holders provided (and continue to provide) referral services from within the private sector, backed by their attainment of this qualification. Sadly this expectation remains, and many applicants currently studying for their Certificate hope examination success will allow them to advertise for, and accept referrals from their colleagues. This expectation is concerning because 1) it potentially weakens the spirit of the referral process, and 2) could erode public trust in the 'specialist' status. There must, and should be, a considerable distinction between the knowledge,

skills and infra-structural support of the Diploma/Specialist surgeon, and the Certificate holder working in private practice. In order to counter this trend, specialist veterinarians must do all we can to support the continuing professional development and advancement of our first opinion colleagues, whilst establishing a level of responsibility (and recognition of personal limitations) towards case management.

**C**oupled with the increase in veterinarians seeking to gain post-graduate qualifications, has been the growth (explosion) of the market for Continuing Professional Education in the UK. Several private companies now offer regular courses on a wide variety of topics, and veterinarians are subscribing to the courses in high numbers. Although conventional didactic lectures are the usual fare, more and more courses are coupled with practical sessions, including cadaver surgery. The quality of the courses on offer is excellent, and provides the delegates with a comprehensive education. However, the challenge confronting course directors is identifying the boundaries within which to contain the syllabus. Because there are no accepted parameters as to what procedures or techniques should be outside the remit of the first opinion veterinarian, it is down to the individual course director to

determine what procedures should be taught, and what should not. Attempts by lecturers to exclude some of the more challenging procedures from courses have led to a cry of 'elitism' by delegates on the course, a charge that is hard to defend. Indeed, if an individual veterinarian considers they are capable of performing a certain procedure, is it our role to prevent them? Perhaps it is best that we provide appropriate education on how to perform the procedure properly, whilst trying to instil an awareness of some of the peri-operative considerations, and any complications that may be encountered. In this way, we may hopefully encourage the veterinarian to determine for him or herself whether they remain comfortable performing the procedure. Sadly, however, we often find ourselves 'picking up the pieces' after a procedure has been tried, and failed. Herein lies the challenge: how best to nurture the eagerness for continual professional improvement that is essential for a progression of the profession as a whole, without creating unnecessary jealousy and division between the various sectors of the profession?

**I** wonder whether Diplomate colleagues in other European countries are confronting similar challenges?

## Job opportunities:

The Joint Research Unit for Reproductive and Behavioural Physiology in Nouzilly (UMR 6073 INRA-CNRS-University of Tours), involves 130 permanent people working on mechanisms regulating reproduction in farm animals (bovine, ovine, porcine, equine and caprine species) with the aim to improve methods to control reproduction, and on animal behaviour in terms of reproduction, social relationships and food intake. For research projects we have developed experimental surgery in different fields, essentially neurosurgery and abdominal surgery to study gonadic function. Our research Unit has at its disposal a surgery department, including 7 permanent people. This surgery department has also developed collaborations with scientists from university hospitals of Tours and Paris.

Our research unit has advertised a permanent position of Research Engineer for a Veterinary surgeon interested in research. The job includes experimental surgery on large farm animals for research projects of scientists from the research unit or from university hospitals. The engineer will also have to develop new surgical techniques, including imaging to improve experimental investigations in living animals. The annual salary will be around 25,800 Euros. Selection of the successful candidate will be performed by competitive examination.

The INRA Research Center of Nouzilly is located one hour from Paris, and provides an excellent environment with an active research community. A brief description of current projects and recent publications can be found at:

**<http://www.tours.inra.fr/tours/english/prmd/prmd-eng.htm#presentation>**

Interested candidates should contact Dr Danielle MONNIAUX (monniaux@tours.inra.fr, tel : 00 33 02 47 42 79 05) for further information or send a copy of their CV with a letter of intent.