

Embracing digital technology in veterinary practice

Brussels, 13th & 14th May 2019

The Member organizations of the European Coordinating Committee on Veterinary Training (ECCVT) representing academia, veterinarians and veterinary specialists organized a joint seminar in Brussels to explore potentials provided by the use of available digital tools.

The event was held in Brussels and brought together around 50 participants from around Europe and beyond, academics, training providers, statutory bodies, professional veterinary associations, accreditation of education bodies. Lively discussions took place around the impact that digital technologies may have on the veterinary profession, the veterinary practice and the society.

Artificial Intelligence (AI), big data, computer learning were some of the items that triggered the exchange of many views about the challenges and opportunities that these new tools bring to veterinarians.

Whereas:

- ✓ The way that veterinarians communicate with their clients is changing;
- ✓ Mobile phone is an immediate source of any information;
- ✓ Big technology companies enter dynamically the healthcare and veterinary practice, by investing more and more in those sectors, developing and providing such digital solutions to everyone;
- ✓ The way of communication and interaction between veterinarians and their clients tends to minimise personal contact and use more and more digital solutions or social media;
- ✓ Online assessment of healthcare and veterinary services through social media or other platforms is nowadays a fact. The majority of clients/patients use online reviews to pick a health care provider and are willing to spend more money the better those reviews are;

- ✓ Practice management systems provide opportunities to veterinarians for better marketing and facilitate access to veterinary services, e.g. through easy online reservation of appointment, remote diagnosis, reminders on treatments, etc.;
- ✓ AI is already used for diagnostic purposes by doctors and veterinarians, e.g. through wearables, to detect atrial fibrillation, diagnose brain tumours, predict treatment shift for cancer, etc., but health professionals do not fully understand how it works;
- ✓ A dehumanisation process of medical and veterinary practice is already applied, it is important that the doctors and veterinarians are trained to assess AI to ensure that results delivered by the machines are reliable results. Therefore, health professionals should understand how a machine and algorithms work to ensure proper diagnosis;
- ✓ AI supports healthcare professionals with diagnosis, veterinarians and doctors have to put more attention on other aspects of their practice, such as communication, health advocacy, big data management, research, collaboration, etc.
- ✓ AI provides opportunities for the practitioners to be available next to their clients 24/7, it is expected that practitioners using better digital technologies will be the ones that would be more successful in the future;
- ✓ Practitioners need to trust machines and learn how to use them, not to compete with them;
- ✓ There is a lack of a legislative framework for the certification of AI, such as wearables or transplants or other digital tools, that can ensure which devices are safe to be used on animals and how they should be used;
- ✓ It is expected a reorganisation of the role of the profession in this new digital era. A gap in legal and ethical guidelines is currently present and foreseen to be so for some years;
- ✓ The question is no longer if but when digital simulation revolution will occur in health education;
- ✓ Computers deliver results based on the input they receive, therefore teaching of next generations of veterinarians should emphasize on critical thinking and critical evaluation of information. Teachers should move from being expert teachers to become facilitator teachers;
- ✓ Emphasis is now on the team rather than on one profession doing everything, education and research should adapt to facilitate interdisciplinary training and promote a vet-lead team for the future;
- ✓ External Quality Assurance of digital education is important and should particularly assess the quality of students' experience, not only students' satisfaction;
- ✓ Accreditation is currently the safest way to get high ranking of education services, but in practice it does not favour innovation in teaching;
- ✓ The development of common standards for the assessment of digital teaching and training should include generic principles that can be operational and fit in different contexts;
- ✓ Regulations at all levels should be developed in a way to be fit for purpose

**The European Coordinating Committee on Veterinary Training
(ECCVT)**

calls on all stakeholders involved in veterinary education and training to work together to prepare the veterinary profession for this new digital era

EAEVE, EBVS and FVE

acknowledge that the profession should proactively take responsibility to look into issues related to certification of AI ensuring their reliability, to ownership and use of big data, as well as, to professional liability.

ECCVT would in particular consider that

- ✓ *Competences of graduate veterinarians in the future (Day One Competences) might need to be adapted to include competences to ensure a minimum understanding of how AI and these digital technologies work;*
- ✓ *Future curricula should put more emphasis on soft skills of veterinarians and development of critical thinking;*
- ✓ *Interdisciplinary education should be promoted to facilitate team work;*
- ✓ *The framework for the assessment of digital education have to be incorporated in the European System for the Evaluation of Veterinary Training.*

