FVE GA November 2019
Towards a more diverse and well-balanced profession

‘We are a small profession, and we can only be successful by choosing our priorities and working with our members and with other stakeholders. In addition, everything is always about people. People, who trust each other and appreciate each other. This is what we aim for within FVE.’ said FVE president Rens van Dobbenburgh during his opening address at the general assembly of the Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE), held in Brussels on 8 and 9 November. He mentioned numerous hot topics, including corporates, specialisation, official controls, veterinary medicines regulation, telemedicine, wellness and welfare – that were all further discussed during the Brussels GA.

Towards more diversity and a better workplace
‘Looking at veterinary undergraduates in the UK, 96.9% are white and 80% are female,’ noted Daniella Dos Santos, president of the British Veterinary Association (BVA). ‘This does not reflect our society. There is a real need for more diversity and inclusion in the profession.’ There is also a serious recruitment and retention problem, she observed, with 37% of graduates seeking to leave the profession. ‘Being valued, having a sense of fitting in and role models are important.’

A recent BVA survey showed that one in four respondents had witnessed or experienced discrimination. However, only 37% reported it and only 1% of those that did so found it was dealt with satisfactorily. She went on to describe several initiatives by the BVA, such as support groups and role models. There now a is a British veterinary LGBT+ association, a veterinary ethnicity and diversity society and a society for colleagues with a chronic illness.

FVE survey: measuring wellness in vets
Questions on wellness in the profession were also included in the second FVE survey¹, which was presented at the GA. For example, over a quarter (26%) of

European vets had needed two weeks’ leave due to depression, burn-out, exhaustion or compassion fatigue in the last three years. Overall, veterinarians report a level of stress at work of 7 on a scale of 10, and satisfaction with the profession of 5.3 on a scale of 10. Only 22% of veterinarians said they felt relaxed often or all the time. The survey also showed that the profession is becoming younger, with an increasing share of female veterinarians. To overcome future challenges, there was a need for more training in animal welfare, business and digital skills, and more specialisation, according to respondents.

‘More specialists are needed’
‘With around 4,200 European veterinary specialists and a veterinary population of 309,144 in Europe, specialists only make up around 1.4% of the total number of vets,’ remarked Lidewij Wiersma, CEO of the European Board of Veterinary Specialisation (EBVS), the umbrella organisation of Europe’s veterinary specialist colleges. ‘Many more specialists are needed, and with only around 180 new diplomates per year, it will take too long to catch up.’ She announced that the EBVS is therefore looking into flexible pathways, modular residencies, remote supervision and digital examination. ‘The current system is too rigid, and we’re missing out on many people,’ she said, adding that VetCEE-approved programmes could be used as stepping stones towards Diplomate status.

Welfare of pigs and zoo animals
On the animal welfare front, the GA unanimously adopted the joint FVE and EAPHM position paper on tail docking in pigs. The 6-page document recommends veterinary visits and the management of factors such as environmental enrichment, stocking densities, pen climate and genetic predisposition. The FVE also recommends that, when stopping tail docking in the EU, the EU should halt the importation of tail-docked pigs or

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their meat. Although the routine tail docking of pigs has been forbidden in the European Union since 1994, piglets still undergo the procedure in most EU countries. Welfare of zoo animals was highlighted by Allan Muir of the European Association of Zoos and Aquaria (EAZA). Speaking at the general assembly of the Union of European Veterinary Practitioners (UEVP) on 7 November, he noted that, ‘although the current EU Zoo Directive 1999/22/EC is fit for purpose, it is inconsistently applied across Member States. This is why we’ve developed a Good Practices guidance document for zoo inspectors, to help them distinguish between good and poor zoos.’ The detailed 80-page document is currently available in 8 languages\(^3\). He added that while the 410 accredited EAZA members adhered to its high standards, the vast majority of zoos did not. ‘We don’t even know how many zoos there are – our estimated guess is 5,000 to 6,000 – as there is currently no central EU register for zoos, and licences are often supplied at regional level.’

**Alternatives to antibiotics**

‘As a profession, we need a mind-set change, from ‘cure’ to ‘care’ and animal welfare support,’ stressed professor Johanna Fink-Gremmels (Utrecht University), during the session on Alternatives to antibiotics during the UEVP meeting. She added that good gut health is responsible for 60-70% of the immune system. ‘By improving the animal’s resilience, we can reduce the need for antibiotics. The toolbox of targeted nutrition includes a range of pre- and probiotics, microbiome stabilisers, phytobiotics, phytogenetics as well as vaccination, hygiene and the management of environmental stressors.’

While herbal veterinary products such as essential oils and plant extracts can be an interesting alternative to help reduce the use of antibiotics, most have no marketing authorisation or maximum residue limits, noted Laure Baduel, head of medicines evaluation at the French health and food safety agency Anses. ‘This means there’s no guarantee of the product’s quality and safety for the animal and consumer.’ She advocated setting up a simplified European registration and marketing authorisation system for herbal preparations that have already been widely used in the EU for a number of years. A lively discussion ensued about the use of phytotherapy, homeopathy and autogeneous vaccines in veterinary practice.

**Getting students involved in rural practices**

Another issue flagged during the GA was the lack of young graduates choosing a career in farm animal practice. During a 5-minute presentation as part of the ‘remarkable campaigns’ session during the GA, former FVE president Christophe Buhot described a pilot programme addressing this issue. Launched in France in 2011, the project is based on supervised internships of veterinary students in practice in rural areas. Students gain valuable, tailor-made training and paid work experience in their final year, while practitioners can share their knowledge and possibly find a future colleague through this system. The ministry of Agriculture has set aside 6,500 € per student for the practice and 3,500 € for the school of origin. ‘Over 80% of the students that benefited from this programme now work in rural areas,’ he concluded.

**FVE strategy 2021-2025**

‘It’s time to re-evaluate the profession and reconsider our needs, goals and ambitions,’ confirmed FVE executive director Jan Vaarten, announcing the roadmap for the FVE strategy 2021-2025. Input would be sought from FVE members, sections

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and external stakeholders. The draft strategy will be presented at the upcoming spring general assembly and a final version will be up for adoption end 2020.

The updated European Veterinary Code of Conduct, adopted last June, was presented to the general assembly and is now available online. Other topics discussed during the GA included presentations on One Health, Precision farming and reports of the various working groups (statutory bodies, medicines, animal welfare) and sections (practitioners, state veterinary officers, hygienists and education/research/industry).

The spring general assembly of the FVE will be held in London, on 5 and 6 June 2020.


European Association of State Veterinary Officers:
Jane Clark (UK), Cornelia Rossi-Broy (Germany), Ole-Herman Tronerud (Norway), Mark McCarthy (Ireland), Romano Zilli (Italy) -

The Animal welfare working group:
Sean Wensley (UK), Stefano Messori (Italy), Thomas Richter (Germany), Léonard Théron (Belgium), Stefan Gunnarsson (Sweden), Dominique Autier-Dérian (France), Vibe Pedersen Lund (Denmark), Ann Criel (FECAVA), Mette Uldahl (FEEVA), Giovanni Guadagnini (EAPHM), Kenelm Lewis (UEVP), Torill Moseng (FVE) and Heather Bacon (observer, UK).

The Statutory bodies working group:
Mark Veilly (France), Roberta Benini (Italy), Siegfried Moder (Germany), Manual Sant’Ana (Portugal), Lino Vella (Malta), Stuart Reid (UK)