

GAS LINK TO THREE MISCARRIAGES AT SINGLE PRACTICE

THREE members of staff from the same UK veterinary practice are believed to have suffered miscarriages during a 12-month period after exposure to inhaled anaesthetics at work, it has been revealed.

Another vet working part-time at the same practice during the same period also gave premature birth. An active scavenger system was not in use on the premises at the time.

All of the women who miscarried – two vets and a veterinary nurse – lost their babies at less than 10 weeks' gestation. The staff members are reported to have smelled the (unnamed) product involved, but on investigation, no equipment leaks were detected.

The two vets involved were exposed to anaesthetics for up to three hours a day, but not on a daily basis. The exposure of the veterinary nurse was "considerably less", said the report.

The tragic series of events was outlined in the *Veterinary Pharmacovigilance in the United Kingdom Annual Review 2014*, published by the VMD on 25 January 2016.

The online 68-page report also details the premature birth at 32 weeks' gestation of a vet employed two days a week at the same practice during the same time period.

Marketing authorisation holders (MAHs) are obliged to send all serious animal and human adverse event (AE) reports to the VMD's pharmacovigilance database within 15 days of becoming aware of the incident.

In the case of the vet who gave premature birth, the report said: "The MAH of the product involved in these cases has contacted the practice to emphasise



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the warnings in relation to pregnancy, and to provide advice on the use of active scavenger systems that were not in use at the time of these incidents."

The identities of the veterinary personnel involved, and the geographical location of the practice in question, have not been officially disclosed. However, investigations by *Veterinary Times* indicated the practice concerned is in Scotland.

Official advice

The VMD's official advice published in the pharmacovigilance report, which details a total of 30 AE incidents involving vets and vet nurses, is: "Particular care should be taken during pregnancy. Inhalation of anaesthetics appears to pose the most serious risk, but the risks can be minimised by taking appropriate measures. You should also be aware of the risks posed by infectious agents (for example, live vaccines)."

The VMD later confirmed the active substance being linked to all four incidents at the practice was sevoflurane.

Giles Davis, head of the Pharmacovigilance Unit at the VMD, told *Veterinary Times*: "Although it cannot be definitively concluded whether the product involved was actually responsible, these unfortunate cases highlight the importance of users following the safety warnings."

"The summary of product characteristics, and package leaflets for all inhalational anaesthetics, provide advice on scavenging and specifically state pregnant and breastfeeding women should not have any contact with the product and should avoid operating rooms and animal recovery areas.

"Having received these reports, the company marketing the product visited the practice involved to further educate staff. As the user warnings are already very comprehensive, no further action is required, but we wanted to highlight this important issue in our annual review."

The full review can be found at <http://bit.ly/1otdxB5> or search for "veterinary review 2014" on <https://www.gov.uk>

BVA president Sean Wensley said: "This will have been very distressing for the professionals involved, though it is not appropriate for the BVA to comment directly on these specific cases.

"The BVA provides employers, employees and locums with extensive advice on maternity, paternity and adoption rights, as well as outlining rights and responsibilities when dealing with pregnancy at work. Our guidance includes a template risk assessment for new and expectant mothers, and addresses the issues relating to anaesthetic gases. It states the use of active scavenging systems reduces the risk to expectant mothers, although there is still the potential for some anaesthetic gases to leak into theatres and avoid the scavenging system.

"The RCVS Practice Standards Scheme also includes a module on anaesthesia and practices in the scheme must meet a number of requirements → **page 2**



Caesarean study aims to boost success after surgery

Sotirios Karvountzis.

THE second stage of an XLVets audit on caesarean procedures in cattle has closed, with more than 4,500 case studies submitted from 49 XLVets vet practices across the UK. It is anticipated the results will help farmers and vets maximise a cow's return to full health after surgery.

The audit was devised and organised by vet Sotirios Karvountzis, of Shepton Veterinary Group in Shepton Mallet, Somerset. Of the 4,500 case studies, around 3,000 stem from suckler herds, and the remainder are from dairy herds.

In the first stage of the audit, data was collected on aspects such as reason for the caesareans, including deformed calves, twins, calving difficulty, cow cleanliness and operating technique. The second phase involved monitoring the postoperative care and the animal's recovery over the following two weeks. Further information was gathered on, for example, speed of wound healing and weight gain of the calf. The final phase of the study is continuing and involves monitoring the health and performance of the cows and heifers during the 18 months post-surgery. It will include information on subsequent performance and fertility and enable factors affecting the success of operations to be evaluated.

Mr Karvountzis explained: "We had run a pilot scheme here at the Shepton practice, but a larger dataset was needed to draw some meaningful conclusions. So this is the first study of this scale to have been carried out, and it would not have been possible without the collaborative spirit of XLVets practices and the cooperation of their farm clients."

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¹ Patterson, S. 2012. *Pseudomonas otitis infection*. NAVCA Clinician's Brief Consultant on call, September, Pp 60-63. Distributed in GB by Norbrook Laboratories (GB) Ltd, 1 Saum Way East, Oakley Hay Industrial Estate, Corby, NN18 3EX. Legal Category: UK: [POM-V] RO: [POM] Marbodex Aural® Ear Drops, Suspension for Dogs contains 3.0mg marbofloxacin, 10.0mg clotrimazole and 1.0mg dexamethasone per ml. Use antibiotics responsibly. 3635-SA(D)-UK-18/02/16

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In brief

■ ON YOUR MARKS:

Challengers of all abilities are wanted to take on ZSL London Zoo's 10k Stampede. The event, which follows a route around London Zoo and Regent's Park, will take place on 17 April to raise funds for the Zoological Society of London's global wildlife work. Last year's event raised more than £40,000. Running fees include zoo entry and a medal and goody bag will be given to all finishers. Prizes will be presented to the first three males and females, and the fastest average team. For more information and booking, visit www.zsl.org/stampede by midday on 16 April.

■ PRODUCT DISTRIBUTION:

Virbac has taken over distribution of topical ectoparasiticide range, Activyl. The prescription-only products, based on the active ingredient indoxacarb, are effective against developing flea life stages in the immediate environment of the pet. Virbac product manager Kate Woolley said: "Virbac is a global leader in parasitology and is using its knowledge and expertise to develop a portfolio of award-winning products. We are delighted to add Activyl to our range of parasiticides."

■ RIGHT WAY UP: Ten upside-down jellyfish (*Cassiopea*) have made the journey from Living Coasts in Torquay to the National Marine Aquarium in Plymouth. As their name suggests, the jellyfish live with their tentacles pointing upwards, meaning their keepers had to ensure the carry boxes were the right way up. Upside-down jellyfish are effectively floating greenhouses, with algae in their tentacles – named lappets, or oral arms – that make food using sunlight.

■ LOW PROTEIN SILAGE:

An animal submitted to one of Scotland's Rural College's (SRUC) veterinary investigation centres has confirmed fears some silages fed to livestock this winter are low in protein and could, if unnoticed, lead to slow starvation and death. The dead cow, examined by vets from the SAC Consulting division of SRUC, was diagnosed with rumen impaction.

■ APPOINTMENT: Sarah Cleaveland OBE, a member of the WSAVA one health committee and professor of comparative epidemiology at the University of Glasgow, has been appointed to the National Academy of Medicine (NAM) in the US. NAM aims to respond to the world's most significant health-related challenges and inform work in science, health and medicines.

■ MICROCHIPPING: Welsh Government deputy minister for farming and food, Rebecca Evans, has reminded owners of the impending compulsory microchipping for dogs in Wales. By 6 April, dogs older than eight weeks will need to be microchipped, with owner details registered on an approved database.

Family of lions rescued from 'world's saddest zoo'

THE Worldwide Veterinary Service (WVS) is celebrating after the rescue of a lioness and her cubs from what has been dubbed the "world's saddest zoo".

According to the WVS, Mery, Zita and Gita have been rescued from Gyumri Zoo in Armenia and moved to the Caucasus Wildlife Refuge, a privately protected area managed by the Foundation for the Preservation of Wildlife and Cultural Assets (FPWC).

The move came amid a *Daily Mail* report saying the animals "scraped along on a starvation diet of slaughterhouse scraps and scavenged woodland plants".

The WVS said it identified swift action was required and, despite difficult weather conditions, managed a seamless transfer of the zoo's last inhabitants. The lions are said to be

in a good physical and mental state as they live in heated cages until a quarantine station is built. They will remain there until they are moved to a facility outside of Armenia.

WVS founder Luke Gamble said the move was possible because of the "huge tide of support" and especially thanked International Animal Rescue for its "phenomenal support".

"It may only be the first step on a much bigger journey for Mery, Zita and Gita but getting them out was imperative and a brilliant achievement by all the teams concerned," he said.

Owing to a memorandum signed between the WVS and the FPWC, the parties are to work together towards in situ conservation, animal rehabilitation and rescue initiatives in Armenia.

For details, visit <http://wvs.org.uk>



The rescue team working in difficult weather conditions.

Vet-farmer relationship key to vaccine strategy – report

VETS could do more to communicate the importance of effective vaccination strategies on British farms, according to a study.

A report by the University of Nottingham School of Veterinary Medicine and Science, which looked at disease prevention on dairy farms, revealed variations in the implementation of vaccination strategies. In some cases, it found instead of proactive and preventive strategies, vaccinations were only carried out in response to confirmed or suspected diagnoses.

A total of 38 vaccines are registered in the UK for use in cattle, offering protection against a number of infections.

The study on the perceptions and challenges of vaccination among farmers and vets was carried out on behalf of AHDB Dairy, a not-for-profit organisation working on behalf of Britain's dairy farmers. Interviews with farmers and vets throughout England, Scotland and Wales were carried out to determine attitudes to vaccination and examine decision-making in the absence of a national vaccination strategy.

The report highlighted in Brit-

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ain no prescriptive guidelines state which vaccines farmers should use.

This is in contrast to human and companion animal medicine, where vaccine schedules are available for use by practitioners, patients and owners.

Researchers found most farmers were using one or more vaccines and a minority had never vaccinated their cattle. Some vaccinations were carried out in response to confirmed or suspected diagnosis of a vaccine-preventable disease, rather than a proactive and preventive strategy.

Speaking to *Veterinary Times*, the University of Nottingham's clinical associate professor in farm animal medicine and epidemiology and co-author of the research paper, Wendela Wapenaar, said: "I think there is a huge opportunity for vets to proactively talk to farmers about vaccination schemes for their farm.

"Vets need to approach the

farmer, as our interviews with farmers highlighted their train of thought is 'if the vet doesn't talk about it, I don't need to worry about it', because they think their vet will tell them if they need to vaccinate against something or adjust their vaccination protocol."

Client communication

If vets are struggling to find time to approach their busy clients, the annual review of their herd health plan could be a good opportunity to talk to clients about optimising vaccination, Prof Wapenaar suggested.

"Vets are seen as one of the most important independent advisors on animal health on their farm, and the vet's advice and opinion is highly valued by most farmers."

The study highlighted while farmers trust their vets' vaccination advice, it was not always followed. Prof Wapenaar said it appears the vet-farmer relationship plays a key role; if farmers trust their vet, they are more likely to take a course of action if advised to do so.

"The problem sometimes lies with the vet, who may not be confident enough to say 'I want you take to this

course of action' because he or she is not sure if the [farmer] needs to. Or, he or she doubts the farmer will be receptive to the advice," she said. "The need to vaccinate depends on many factors, such as the risk of contracting disease, but also the willingness of the farmer to take risks. Identifying and quantifying these risks is where the Government and industry support could come in."

Training to improve communication skills could benefit students and qualified veterinarians, Prof Wapenaar said.

"Like you attend CPD for other, more technical veterinary aspects, I think you should attend CPD [on how] to communicate with clients," she said. "It's just as important as everything else."

Listening to clients is also a key factor, she added.

"You need to take the time to listen and I think new graduates struggle with that because they are busy trying to prove themselves, which they feel they have to – and they do have to," she said.

"It's not a criticism, it's just really difficult when you are busy doing that, to make time to listen to your client and find

out what he or she wants to achieve."

The report found farmers tended to distinguish their vets from others. Assigning one vet per farm, and appointing a secondary vet in case of absence, would strengthen client relationships, Prof Wapenaar said.

University of Nottingham research fellow and lead author Imogen Richens said: "The aim of this research was to identify the motivators and barriers of farmers and vets to the implementation of vaccination strategies on British dairy farms.

"The trend of reduced use of antibiotics in farm animals emphasises the importance of preventive measures to control endemic diseases, such as leptospirosis, which have an impact on the health of cattle and people working with cattle.

"We found there is an opportunity for farmers to be more aware of their herd's disease status by working with their vet. Our research also highlighted concerns around the practical use of cattle vaccines. Proactive communication between vets and farmers will improve compliance issues."

For the full AHDB Dairy report, visit <http://bit.ly/1KrZyD>

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to minimise the risk of using anaesthetic gases in practice.

"We recommend all involvement with general anaesthetic procedures should be reassessed and then regularly reviewed throughout pregnancy, and that exposure must be reduced as much as possible. Practices should also ensure appropriate training, proper maintenance of equipment and monitoring. We encourage all veterinary professionals to use our advice."

A study published in the journal *Occupational and Environmental Medicine* in 2008 found female vets were twice as likely to have a miscarriage if they did not protect

themselves from certain occupational hazards.

The study looked at the experiences of 1,197 female vets working in clinical practice, who graduated from Australian veterinary schools between 1960 and 2000, responding to a questionnaire-based survey.

Researchers found more than a twofold increase in the risk of miscarriage in women exposed to anaesthetic gases, for more than an hour a week, without using a gas scavenger.

There was also a twofold increase in those who used pesticides at work, and an 80 per cent greater risk of miscarriage in those who performed more than five x-ray examinations per week, compared with those who performed five or less.

One medicine concert

VET Noel Fitzpatrick has launched One Live, a music concert to raise awareness of one medicine.

The event, taking place on 4 June at Loseley Park, Guildford, will feature Reef as its headline band, with support from The Feeling and Scouting for Girls.

Prof Fitzpatrick, of Channel 4's *The Supervet*, said: "I truly believe one medicine is the only rational solution to finding cures for diseases like cancer and the only rational thought process to look after all animals on our ever-shrinking planet."

One Live is in support of The Humane Trust, the first UK charity to generate awareness and development of new health care initiatives for the benefit of everyone.

For tickets, visit <http://bit.ly/210TECW>