

# Research into Practice .... Practice into Research ....

## Summary Report by John Bonner

Veterinary surgeons in private practice will play an increasingly pivotal role in developing new methods of diagnosing and treating animal diseases, according to speakers at a symposium hosted by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons' Research Committee.

The meeting identified measures that must be taken to encourage collaborations between general practitioners and their colleagues in academic and industrial research. Such partnerships are necessary both to confirm the value of the methods already used in practice as well as to generate new techniques. But collaborative research may also provide a host of other benefits, helping young veterinarians to develop their skills and to improve the financial stability of their practices.

For many veterinary surgeons the first stage in becoming more closely involved in research is through the process of clinical audit, explained the RCVS President Mrs Lynne Hill. This concept is already familiar to most practitioners in the context of monitoring serious clinical problems such as deaths under anaesthesia or surgical wound breakdowns.

But clinical audit means much more than - it is so crucial to improving the already high quality of British veterinary practices, that it is to be incorporated into the new RCVS Practice Standards Scheme. For practitioners, clinical audit gives them a yardstick for measuring their clinical performance and for colleagues in the veterinary schools it will unlock the treasury of information held in a practice's clinical records.

A British-trained veterinary surgeon working in the USA told the meeting what could be achieved by pooling the information held by a large number of practices. Hugh Lewis is president of DataSavant, a subsidiary company set up by the giant American veterinary group, Banfield. All 500 hospitals in the group use exactly the same computer software. Clinical records of all new cases are downloaded each day to a data warehouse which currently holds information on 20 million cats and dogs, he said.

DataSavant's role is to mine the information stored in the database to identify clues on how to improve the clinical services offered by its 1000-plus veterinary surgeons. But the information will also be published to allow the whole of the veterinary profession and their clients' animals to benefit from the new knowledge.

Academic veterinarians and private practitioners at the meeting acknowledged that it may be some time before Britain has the IT infrastructure in place to readily gather and analyse the data in practice records. However, there is certainly an appetite for enhanced cooperation, which the RCVS Research Committee hopes it can help to satisfy in the near future.

In one vital area, the UK is already making good progress by ensuring that there is a plentiful supply of veterinary surgeons with the key skills they need to design and manage ambitious practice-based research projects. The Government is supporting an initiative to provide postgraduate training in clinical research for veterinary practitioners. James Wood of the Cambridge Infectious Diseases Consortium is managing the project. He said the initiative provides many different types of training but a one week residential course has proved particularly popular. Already 30 veterinary practitioners have attended the course. They go home with a research project which they would hope to complete within a year. "Even with the time pressures of working in a busy veterinary practice, this is a practical reality and develops a superbly analytical approach to practice based problems" he said.

## **Further information**

[View further information on research and the RCVS Research Committee.](#)

[View the full report of the seminar.](#)

[View further information on the Cambridge Infectious Diseases Consortium.](#)

Find out more on research [opportunities for veterinary surgeons](#) arising from the Veterinary Training and Research Initiative (VTRI).

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