

## ANTIMICROBIAL RESISTANCE

# Antimicrobial use: the need to act responsibly

Jackie Atkinson, director of authorisations at the Veterinary Medicines Directorate, discusses how the issue of antimicrobial resistance is being addressed at a European level and what veterinary practitioners can do to ensure they are using antimicrobials responsibly

THE Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD) is responsible for issuing and maintaining marketing authorisations for veterinary medicinal products containing antimicrobials. As part of this responsibility, it has to consider the issue of antimicrobial resistance and the implications of this for both animal and human health. It also has other responsibilities relating to antimicrobials in the following areas: pharmacovigilance (adverse event monitoring), in particular in cases of suspected lack of efficacy in animals; collection of data on sales of antimicrobial veterinary medicines; surveillance for antimicrobial resistance in animals; and commissioning research. It is also responsible for policy and legislation relating to antimicrobials and their use in animals.

In November last year, the European Commission's Directorate General for Health and Consumers published an 'Action plan against the rising threats of antimicrobial resistance', to coincide with the European Antibiotics Awareness Day (VR, November 26, 2011, vol 169, pp 565-566). The plan, which can be found online at [http://ec.europa.eu/food/food/biosafety/antimicrobial\\_resistance/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/food/food/biosafety/antimicrobial_resistance/index_en.htm), included 12 actions covering both human and animal medicines. Those specifically directed at animal medicines include:

- Strengthening the regulatory framework on veterinary medicines and on medicated feed;
- Introducing recommendations for prudent use in veterinary medicine;
- Introducing a legal tool to enhance prevention and control of infections in animals in the new EU Animal Health Law;
- Promoting efforts to analyse the need for, and to introduce, new antibiotics into veterinary medicine;

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- Strengthening surveillance systems on antimicrobial resistance and antimicrobial consumption in animal medicine.

The next stage will be the development of a five-year action plan by the Commission based on the 12 key actions. The VMD and other government departments will seek to influence how these actions are developed and taken forward, as will many other stakeholders. The VMD will equally be engaged in influencing the content of revised EU legislation governing veterinary medicinal products, as well as other pieces of EU legislation that are currently under revision, for example, that on medicated feeds.

The VMD will provide updates on the development of revised EU legislation but, in the meantime, would like to emphasise just how important it is to use antimicrobials responsibly, not just with the aim of slowing the development of antibiotic resistance, but also of seeking to demonstrate that it is possible to influence and modify prescribing habits through guidance and without necessarily resorting to legal measures in every situation.

## Responsible use

Responsible use, or, using EU terminology, prudent use, does not simply equate to using fewer antimicrobials. It encompasses using antimicrobials to complement good farm management practices to minimise disease development and then selecting the correct antimicrobial and using this by the appropriate route of administration, at the correct dose, for the correct period of time. The following is the definition that is used by the heads of medicines agencies across the EU:

'It does not simply mean using less antimicrobials, it means justified use (based on a properly established diagnosis) of the most appropriate sensitive antimicrobial in a way optimising its clinical efficacy in the specific clinical cases and taking reasonable steps to ensure the method of use (including dose regime) and precautions applied help limit the potential for resistance to develop.'

An important series of guidance documents that all UK livestock veterinary surgeons should be aware of, and which they should embed in their day-to-day practice, are the RUMA (Responsible Use of Medicines in Agriculture Alliance) guidelines on the use of antimicrobials. These are available for the poultry, pig, cattle, sheep and fish sectors. In addition to these full guides, there are shortened versions available, which are specifically directed at farmers. The relevant guides can be accessed via [www.ruma.org.uk/antimicrobials.htm](http://www.ruma.org.uk/antimicrobials.htm)

The BVA has also issued helpful guidance in the form of a poster outlining an eight-point plan on the use of antimicrobials, which is available to download at [www.bva.co.uk/public/documents/bva\\_antimicrobials\\_poster.pdf](http://www.bva.co.uk/public/documents/bva_antimicrobials_poster.pdf). The BVA's specialist divisions are now advancing the poster recommendations into species-specific guidelines because responsible use of antimicrobials is important for all animals. The British Small Animal Veterinary Association has produced a poster entitled 'Are you PROTECTing your antibacterials?', which highlights the need for appropriate antibacterial use and provides some suggestions for empirical therapy of several common conditions in cats and dogs. The British Equine Veterinary Association and British Cattle Veterinary Association are also currently undertaking a review of the BVA's poster with a view to adapting the message for equine and bovine practitioners, respectively.

The VMD has produced its own leaflet on antimicrobials aimed at veterinarians, and this can be downloaded from [www.vmd.defra.gov.uk/pdf/leaflet\\_antimicrobials.pdf](http://www.vmd.defra.gov.uk/pdf/leaflet_antimicrobials.pdf)

Clearly this is an area of considerable interest where there are many parties involved with a shared interest in ensuring animal health and welfare and public health. All are seeking to communicate the importance of using antimicrobials responsibly. The key message can be condensed quite simply to 'Use the *right* drug in the *right* amount by the *right* route for the *right* period of time.'

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