

Discussions Continue on Assessment of Veterinary Education Equivalence (courtesy AVMA)

The American Association of Veterinary State Boards and the AVMA are pleased to report on continued discussions regarding the certification of foreign-educated veterinarians seeking licensure in the United States.

Currently, the AAVSB operates its Program for the Assessment of Veterinary Education Equivalence, and the AVMA operates its Educational Commission for Foreign Veterinary Graduates program. Both are designed to assist state veterinary regulatory boards in assessing the educational qualifications of foreign-trained graduates. In most jurisdictions, the educational requirement can be met by graduating from an AVMA-accredited school or by earning an ECFVG certificate. Twelve regulatory boards have also adopted PAVE.

To avoid duplicative efforts and address perceived legal concerns, the AAVSB and AVMA entered into a dialogue to discuss the goals and concerns of the two associations surrounding veterinary educational standards. This dialogue culminated in the AAVSB and AVMA appointing three representatives each from the PAVE Board and the ECFVG to discuss the desirability and feasibility of developing a single program.

The representatives met twice in 2003 and recommended that legal counsel from the two associations meet with an independent attorney to determine the feasibility, and in particular, the legal feasibility, of continuing discussions regarding the development of a single, independent program. The three attorneys met Nov. 5, and in early December, submitted their report.

The attorneys' report indicated that "the meeting was collegial" and the discussion was "far ranging and candid." Although "legal counsel did not identify any insuperable legal obstacles to the creation of a new, independent certification organization," neither the AVMA nor AAVSB attorney "recommends or opposes the creation of such an organization."

Both sides acknowledged "important policy and economic considerations ... would have to be addressed and resolved in creating a new organization or in fashioning any alternative to the present situation." In conclusion, counsel are "of the opinion that the policy, governance and financial issues need to be addressed first and that any legal issues will be better defined and may be better addressed after these fundamentals are resolved."

Certification of graduates of non-accredited institutions is an important issue for the veterinary profession, regulatory boards, and the public. As such, the AVMA and AAVSB appreciate the efforts and commitment of the ECFVG and PAVE Board representatives. The two associations agree they did a remarkable job in gathering a tremendous amount of information. Their effort was the first of many steps toward the possibility of a single, independent veterinary educational equivalence assessment program.

Meanwhile...

Opportunity to Comment on Proposed Rule Change to Practice Act Expires on February 2, 2004

The Illinois Department of Professional Regulation (DPR) recently published a proposed rule change in the Illinois Register (dated 12/19/03) to amend the veterinary practice act to recognize the Program for Assessment of Veterinary Education Equivalence (PAVE) for graduates of non-accredited schools/colleges of veterinary medicine. Please see:

http://ilsos.net/departments/index/register/register_volume27_issue51.pdf

Review pg. 18955 for the full text of the proposed rule change. The public has 45 days from the date of publication (i.e. until 2/4/04) to comment. The proposed rule change is also posted on the DPR Web site:

<http://www.ildpr.com/WHO/ARprospd/WEBpropVet.pdf>

If you choose to comment on these proposed rules, please send your comments by facsimile to:

Barb Smith
Illinois Department of Professional Regulation

(217) 782-7645 (fax)

Weighing the Threat of Avian Flu (courtesyNewsday.com)

Avian influenza has been identified in 10 countries in Asia, forcing the destruction of poultry flocks and killing 10 people. Scientists are trying to determine just how dangerous it may be to humans.

Q: Why is the World Health Organization concerned about the potential for a human pandemic?

A: Someone in Asia could contract the avian flu and normal human flu simultaneously -- and the avian flu could take genetic material from the human viruses and turn into a human-to-human transmissible agent. The sloppy way influenza reproduces itself makes the exchange of genes possible.

Q: How bad would that be?

A: Scientists say it could be severe. Both jet travel and the rise of densely populated urban areas contribute to swift infection. In 1918-1919, the flu claimed 40 million to 50 million lives in 18 months. In 1995, the National Institutes of Health and the WHO met to figure out what would happen if such a pandemic occurred today. They concluded that even if it were possible to spot a new virus and swiftly make seed stock for vaccine production, it would take six months to produce millions of doses -- enough to protect only a small percentage of the world's population.

Q: Under United Nations agencies' guidance, Asian nations are slaughtering millions of chickens and ducks. Will this stop the problem?

A: The agencies argue that preventing a larger outbreak requires destroying tens of millions of animals. Though "ring isolation," infected animals are identified and all poultry on farms within about 2 miles are destroyed.

Q: What are the chances this virus will infect flocks in the United States?

A: Both the European Union and the U.S. Department of Agriculture have taken steps to limit importation of poultry and exotic birds from Asia. In general, chickens that end up in American grocery stores are from U.S. or Canadian poultry operations.

Regardless of the origin of the meat, WHO officials insist, it is not possible to catch avian flu by eating chickens. The virus can be transmitted only from a live chicken, or its blood, urine or feces.

Q: Why are we seeing influenza in birds?

A: Influenzas of all kinds are routinely carried by aquatic migratory birds, such as ducks and geese, without harm. Chickens and ducks are exposed when the virus is passed in the fowls' feces and urine -- and sometimes these viruses can be dangerous to the domestic birds, as appears to be the case with this strain. Though chickens have a primitive immune system, it appears inadequate against a virulent form of influenza.

Q: Why isn't the bird flu virus automatically dangerous to people?

A: Bird viruses don't generally cause epidemics in humans because they lack genetic factors required to invade human cells. A dangerous infection that can be transmitted person to person requires at least two known characteristics. One is neuraminidase, an enzyme the virus uses to pinch off bits of animals' cells to wrap the virus, allowing it to escape into the bloodstream. Some neuraminidase chemicals are only efficient in birds cells; others work well in human cells. The second is a chemical called haemagglutinin; some forms perform better on human red blood cells; some only work on bird cells.

Q: How hard has the virus hit humans so far?

A: Fewer than a dozen cases in people have been confirmed by lab tests, and there is so far no evidence that the virus can spread from one person to another.

Q: How do flu viruses in migratory fowl begin to infect other animals?

A: Almost all new influenza strains originate in China, where farms tend to be packed densely. Pigs and ducks are generally present and can be aggressive, fighting over turf and food. Ducks, which got the virus from migratory birds, pass it on to the pigs -- whose genetic factors help the virus mutate into a mammalian form, serving as a "viral mixing vessel."

Q: How does this mutation happen?

A: Influenza is a large RNA virus composed of eight chromosomes. Flu genes are packed in a sloppy manner, and when the virus replicates, it often absorbs genetic material from its host animal.

These mutated forms arising from pigs have been called "swine flu" -- the flu pandemic of 1918 was one. In 1976, the United States had a swine flu scare following the death of an 18-year-old undergoing basic training at Fort Dix, N.J. The administration of President Gerald Ford tried to inoculate every American, and an epidemic never materialized. (But the vaccine may have caused a rare neurological effect, Guillain-Barre syndrome, in a small percentage of recipients.)

Q: If this avian flu becomes transmissible from human to human, would anyone be immune?

A: The human immune system "remembers" influenza viruses it has seen before. In 1918, very few elderly contracted the virus or died of it. Scientists believe a similar form of flu may have circulated in 1889, accounting for the apparent immunity of older populations.

Animal Welfare League in Need of Medical Donations

On Dec. 16, 2003, the Illinois Dept. of Agriculture shut down a puppy mill breeding operation in Amboy, Illinois. Over 176 dogs were confiscated from horrific conditions. Most of these were German Shepherd Dogs. There were also Great Danes, Belgian Malinois, Belgian Sheepdog and several Japanese Chin. Dogs were chained to trees and posts, most without any type of shelter at all. There were no bowls for water/food and all of the animals were emaciated. There were crates lined up in the back yard with dogs living in them, some were adult bitches w/litters of puppies. They were literally on top of each other, swimming in liquid feces/urine. Many had feet/pads frostbitten and some had feet that were frozen to the ground. 9 dogs died before the rescue could be completed. In the trailer home, over 60 animals were found, literally on top one another. The stench was unbearable. All had diarrhea from whipworms, hookworms, tapeworms, roundworms. All had coccidian and were stiff from hard, dried feces down to the skin. The entire situation was almost incomprehensible. The animals have been removed and with the exception of 22 that are in a rescue (with sarcoptic mange), all are legally retained at the Animal Welfare League in Chicago Ridge, Illinois.

The AWL is a non-profit organization that relies on donations. For the most part, they function day to day fairly well, with regular adoption fees and donations funding their program. However, overnight, they had 176 animals checked in from Amboy, many that required immediate Veterinary care, 9 dead, and the rest very, very ill. The amount of antibiotics they are going through is astronomical, as well as Panacur, Droncit and Albon. They have operated on several dogs' feet, removing the dead tissues and frozen pads from the frostbite. These require daily bandage changing. They will be spaying/neutering every one of these animals before they leave the facility to go in to rescue so surgical supplies are needed.

Please consider donating something to the AWL for the Amboy dogs. The adult dogs are all on Nutro and the puppies are on Science Diet. They are in desperate need of antibiotics, surgical supplies, wormers and Albon. Any donation you could provide would be very much appreciated. If you have any questions, or have something you

would like to have transported, you can contact Sherry Ryan at 217-785-4753 or 217-626-2310, or through my email at sryan@agr.state.il.us.

Is Sales Tax Application Confusing Your Staff?

Have you forgotten or put off registering for the ISVMA Convention? You'll want to register on-line immediately if you are concerned about the rumors of sales tax audits and their implications for veterinary practices. George Sorensen, recently retired counsel for the Illinois Department of Revenue and noted expert on sales tax application in Illinois, will be speaking on Friday February 13 at the ISVMA Convention. He plans on discussing sales tax issues and will address many rumors regarding veterinary practice audits. This is going to be an informative discussion and could be of great value to your practice!

Register for convention by visiting <http://www.isvma.org/registration.htm>.