

## European veterinary specialists denounce alternative medicine

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In a review article in *Veterinary Sciences Tomorrow* (30 November 2004), F.J. van Sluijs, Head of the Department of Clinical Sciences of Companion Animals, Utrecht University, discussed the question whether homeopathy can withstand scientific testing. He concluded that the gold standard for the therapeutic effectiveness of a medication is the outcome of a randomized double-blind clinical trial, and that after 7 years of investigation there is still no evidence whatever that extremely diluted solutions of homeopathic substances have any effect.

What is the attitude of European associations of veterinary practitioners concerning the use of homeopathy in veterinary practice? The *New Scientist* (10 December 2005, <http://press.newscientist.com/data/pdf/press/2529/252908.pdf>) reported some of their statements. On November 19, the Federation of Veterinarians in Europe (FVE) issued a policy statement urging its 200,000 members "to work only on the basis of scientifically proven and evidence-based methods and to stay away from non-evidence-based methods." The Swedish Veterinary Association banned its members from homeopathic practice decades ago, and its president stated that it is "absolutely unacceptable for vets to work without a scientific basis." UK's Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) rejects any suggestion that it supports homeopathy, but states that it takes a neutral stance. In early September the British Veterinary Association issued a statement attacking plans by the UK Medicines and Healthcare Product Regulatory Agency to license homeopathic medicines without demanding clinical trials. It looks like there is a move, at least by some associations, toward advice to eliminate homeopathy from veterinary practice.

Remarkably more robust is the announcement by the European veterinary specialists. The European Board of Veterinary Specialisation (EBVS), an organization which oversees veterinary specialization, is now officially moving against supplementary, alternative and complimentary medicine. In its meeting on April 16 and 17, 2005, this Board unanimously agreed on incorporation of the following statement into its Policies and Procedures: "The EBVS only recognizes scientific, evidence-based veterinary medicine which complies with animal welfare legislation. Specialists or Colleges who practice or support implausible treatment modalities with no proof of effectiveness run the risk of withdrawal of their specialist status. No credit points can be granted for education or training in these so-called supplementary, complementary and alternative treatment modalities. Failure of a college to comply with any of the Policies and Procedures of the EVBS may lead to the withdrawal of provisional or full recognition." In a comment to the *New Scientist* (10 December 2005) J.T. Lumeij, EBVS President, said: "The basics of homeopathy are not in agreement with science."

The tough standpoint of the EBVS banning the use of supplementary, complementary and alternative medicine in specialist practices in Europe is a courageous and necessary step and deserves the support of every veterinary scientist. On the other hand: are there not treatments and medications in veterinary medicine whose effectiveness still needs to be proven by evidence-based methods? The finger must be pointed in both directions...