

OPEN LETTER

16th June 2006

Lynne Hill MVB MBA MRCVS,
President,
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Dear Mrs. Hill,

You are doubtless aware that moves are afoot to regularise and legitimise the veterinary prescribing of homeopathic remedies to animals. The consultation is outlined in the VMD document: THE VETERINARY MEDICINES REGULATIONS 2006: PROPOSALS FOR THE ADMINISTRATION OF HOMOEOPATHIC VETERINARY MEDICINAL PRODUCTS. Co-opting homeopathy into the canon of legally approved veterinary medicine has no rational scientific basis. This subject has been raised in various ways over the last several years but this has seemingly had no effect to curtail the practice of veterinary homeopathy. Now the VMD is seeking to rush a consultation on veterinary homeopathic remedies in 6 weeks instead of the 12-week statutory normal minimum, which risks stifling debate in the wider profession. Because of the urgency of this situation we are writing now as an open letter to request that the RCVS urgently makes a clear statement in favour of evidence-based medicine and against the ill-founded and disproven practice of homeopathy.

Background

From 2000 the RCVS included in its Register a list of homeopathic veterinary surgeons “to assist those who might wish to contact a veterinary surgeon offering this type of service”. This had the effect, *de facto*, of appearing to give RCVS approval to the activities of these members.

Within the preamble to the list in the Register has been given the web address of the British Association of Homeopathic Veterinary Surgeons (www.BAHVS.com) wherein we may learn that;

“Suppression of chronic disease (the result of much orthodox treatment) will drive the disease inward, possibly to be later expressed as allergy, asthma, epilepsy, cancer etc.”

and;

“Cantharis - This medicine helps most cases of cystitis.”

“Colocynthis - Colic in horses would be the most common first-aid use of Colocynthis.”

“Hepar sulph. - This is nick-named the ‘ homeopathic antibiotic ’, so effective is it in helping patients to fight septic, purulent infections.”

“Nux vomica - If an animal has stolen too much rich food, or has had access to poisons, Nux vomica should help recovery from the resultant intoxication.”

“Silica - Helps the body to drive out foreign bodies, e.g. grass seeds. The power of this remedy, way beyond its simple chemical capability, is evidence of the power of crystals.”

among a list of unproven assertions as to the efficacy of homeopathic remedies in various conditions.

The BAHVS is the same organization that took the existence of that list as the basis for a claim on their website that they were “RCVS Registered Specialists” and only withdrew that claim under the threat of disciplinary action. They now use a clause that Miss Hern conceded to one of us (SJB) is “just on the right side of the line”.

Certainly the homeopaths feel they have the RCVS’s approval and, forgive us, but as interested observers we are inclined to agree with them.

The RCVS needs to act.

Members of RCVS Council should have been aware that homeopathic remedies have no specific therapeutic efficacy. These preparations cannot reasonably be regarded as anything other than sugar or water, free of content or active principle. There can *never* be a justification for supplying these remedies for use in animals. It is scientifically untenable to hold any other view. With that awareness, the RCVS will understand why we find it deeply professionally offensive that a regulatory body should seek to grant recognition to a belief system that even homeopaths concede is more akin to magic than real medicine. Have Council members made themselves aware of the core beliefs of homeopathy and how they translate into its daily practice? Do they subscribe to the theory of miasms? Do they believe that new remedies can be created by 'grafting'-placing plain sugar pills in a bottle with a remedy pill so that its influence can be transmitted to the others. Can nosodes be made from pathogenic material and used *instead of* licensed vaccinations? This is homeopathy and under the VMD's proposals it is about to gain legislative approval. Veterinarians take an oath at graduation to practise veterinary medicine in the interests of animal welfare. The use of homeopathy on animals under any circumstance is, at the very least, a threat to that oath. Those charged with the governance of the veterinary profession in the UK should acquaint themselves with this fact.

The current situation has other implications. With the advent of compulsory CPD, is it the College's current intention to accept evidence of attendance of courses in homeopathy to satisfy that requirement? It may help the College in considering this point to remind itself of the position statement from the European Board of Veterinary Specialisation;

"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."

We hope you are aware of the strong terms in which the BVA unequivocally condemned homeopathy in its submission to the MHRA.

· *"No genuine "provings" of homœopathic remedies have ever successfully been performed in animals. Wild extrapolation of a disproven human therapeutic modality to animals is therefore an offence to animal welfare." [where "provings" are the process whereby homeopathic remedies are claimed to reveal their sphere of action]*

· *All controlled trials of homœopathic treatment of veterinary patients (four in total) have shown no effect compared to the placebo control groups. There is no evidence whatsoever of a physiological or therapeutic effect in such patients. Instead, the homœopathic ritual of case-taking and remedy matching appears to influence the owner to perceive the animal's condition in a more favourable light, attributing coincidental recovery to the remedy, and even imagining improvement where none is present. While a positive change in attitude to an illness may arguably be of real benefit to a human patient, such an effect on the owner of an animal patient does not help the animal.*

· *This is not purely a concern as regards pet animals - the danger is arguably even more serious in farm animal medicine, where homoeopathy is encouraged within the organic farming industry as being free of side-effects and residues. The question of how any preparation can have a physiological effect and yet be absolutely safe as regards adverse reactions or residue concerns never seems to be addressed, and the consequences for animal welfare of denying these patients proven effective medicines is a grave concern.*

Miss Hern has previously informed one of us (SJB) that, "The RCVS has not got a view on homeopathy as such". It seems now that the RCVS should enable itself to have a view. If it may help, please find enclosed some responses given on behalf of the Royal College of General Practitioners. We ask that the RCVS makes its position clear as a matter of urgency by issuing a statement, in support of evidence-based medicine that has a rational scientific base and deploring the ill-founded and disproven practice of homeopathy, in advance of the VMD's deadline for consultations, which is 7th July 2006.

Yours sincerely

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People have signed as members of veterinary and related professions not as representatives of respective institutions of employment.