

BVA Congress 2008 – Awards Ceremony  
Saturday 27 September 2008  
Royal College of Physicians, London, UK

### **BVA PRESIDENT NICK BLAYNEY'S PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS**

One of the roles of the President of any organisation is to ensure that the interests of the members are being upheld and to examine what is being done on behalf of the members. I look back with pride upon the achievements of the BVA over the last 12 months, some of which fell out of work commenced before I arrived, but also the work in progress. A year is but a short time in the course of some of the projects but it is also long enough for a few inbound challenges as well. More of those later.

The conference of the AVMA is generally the first international conference that an officer attends. I was fortunate to visit Washington in July of last year. Apart from gracious and generous hospitality, it was also for me an important learning experience. Our American colleagues take their lobbying and their political activity very seriously and it caused me to view my own Association from a particular standpoint; namely, how we interact with all the various groups with whom we have to do business. I refuse to use the word stakeholder.

I would therefore like to take a few minutes to consider the many faceted approach we have to the outside world. The BVA has to deal with different groups in different ways, upon different subjects, to different degrees of detail and for different purposes.

Parliament: our honorary associates are valuable beyond measure and we meet with them several times a year. Their recent preference is a mid-morning meeting at Westminster at which we will table three or four key issues agreed in advance. Not only does this provide us with the opportunity to alert them to issues which we consider to be of importance, but also to gain valuable understanding as to the political ramifications. The meetings are brief, organised and efficient. We also have conversation with the political parties – those in power and those not – in order to be ready for any changes in the political landscape that may occur. We were very pleased to be

## **NICK BLAYNEY'S PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS BVA CONGRESS, 27 SEPTEMBER 2008**

invited to meet with Ian Cawsey who is reviewing Labour's animal welfare policy during the summer recess. We were able to provide a great deal of well crafted BVA policy on a whole raft of issues. We have provided representatives drawn from VPG to Bill Wiggin, one of our honorary associates. Mr Wiggin has responsibility for developing Conservative animal welfare policy and he needed the advice of experts in a number of companion animal fields. It is important that the Association is seen as a source of informed advice and it is apparent that we have a long standing and extremely cordial relationship with our honorary associates which is of immense value to the Association.

An area of change in the last year has been in our relationships in Europe. The Association along with the RCVS are joint representatives at the Federation of Vets in Europe and we have long been a partner within the UK Coordination Group which includes SPVS, BSAVA as well as the RCVS. Matters European became increasingly important and it was felt in BVA that we should develop and increase our involvement within the group. We were delighted when we were able to announce the appointment of a part time member of staff based in Brussels. Her advice has already proved valuable in understanding how to approach the leviathan that is the Commission, which doors to knock on and which officials to lobby.

One area we are currently dealing with is the matter of maintaining pet biosecurity controls appropriate to the UK. We are preparing to go into dialogue with the other countries similarly affected who share with us the current derogation with a view to defending it in 2010. The UK Coordination Group members from specialist divisions who are particularly well qualified to speak on the scientific issues involved have developed our position which we have presented to DG Sanco. European National veterinary week, beginning on the 10<sup>th</sup> November and running through for the best part of the year, has biosecurity as its theme and is an opportunity for us to raise this issue at events and parliamentary briefings.

It is an inescapable fact that the majority of this profession's dialogue with government is to do with food production animals and the public health risks attached. There are no areas of animal management that do not require DEFRA to obtain sound advice from the veterinary profession. It is true that there are veterinary colleagues within DEFRA but there is also a need for external organisations to be able deliver advice on and, where necessary, constructive criticism of, DEFRA policy.

**NICK BLAYNEY'S PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS  
BVA CONGRESS, 27 SEPTEMBER 2008**

No sooner had my predecessor finished with FMD than I found myself embroiled in BTV8. This govt, so fond of consultation, consultation, consultation, founded stakeholder groups. Surprisingly a veterinary surgeon was not invited to the core group in the first instance but representations from colleagues supported across several specialist groups secured a place at this important table. BVA has endeavoured at all times to introduce measured veterinary advice into the development of a policy that was agreed with industry.

The profession deserves to take more credit than I fear it will get for the leadership it gave its clients in industry to vaccinate. It was BVA's bluetongue group who developed the necessary features of the supply chain which underpinned prompt and efficient vaccine supply along appropriate legal channels. Our bluetongue group has also recently submitted a paper to the CVO outlining, in our view, the strengths and weaknesses of the BTV strategy 08, with a view to dealing with the exigencies of 2009.

But the bluetongue model has much to teach us about other aspects of our relationship with government and industry, especially relevant in this brave new world of responsibility and cost sharing. The invitations to sit on various stakeholder groups come frequently. We work with colleagues in our specialist divisions on all specialist matters, with the shared desire that we can put forward veterinary surgeons to contribute their knowledge of that particular livestock sector. There is generally no reimbursement and there has to be a limit to the funds which the association sees fit to disburse on such public service activities. The roles and responsibilities of veterinary participants at such meetings is the subject of discussion with Defra and obtaining clarity is essential.

Our dilemma is that, in the absence of sound veterinary advice, decisions may be made on the basis of short term financial expediency. Perish the thought.

It has been our pleasure to welcome into post a new Chief Veterinary Officer, Nigel Gibbens. I and my colleagues have had several meetings with him, as well as of course with the other CVOs, and discussed many issues of importance including the VSA; he has also addressed BVA Council.

## **NICK BLAYNEY'S PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS BVA CONGRESS, 27 SEPTEMBER 2008**

I might just point out, however, that the year has seen significant work in other sectors. The work of the Medicines group is of benefit to every prescribing veterinary surgeon in the country. Recent changes in the waste regulations has impacted on every practice in the country that generates any waste of veterinary origin. Our negotiations with the Environment Agency have I believe, introduced some guidance which will serve the profession well in this complicated, important but not terribly exciting sphere of practice management.

Members will be aware that the BVA set up a new governance structure in 2003, with a board of Directors responsible for the prudent running of the business according to its aims. All the evidence suggests that BVA Ltd is being run effectively. The next piece of the jigsaw is to ensure that the representative requirements of the members are being met. With that in mind the Council Review Group has been formed to carry out a root and branch review of the role and fitness for purpose of BVA Council. This is a daunting task, and I look forward to continuing to serve as a member of the group, alongside individuals from Council to represent a wide range of opinion.

This brings me to another closely linked area of our interface with our members: one of the strengths of this diverse profession is the development of our specialist divisions. Each division can concentrate upon its area of knowledge and come to know it well. However, the old mantra about speaking with one voice is absolutely crucial to the robust representation of the profession as a whole. It has been my pleasure to work very closely with colleagues from the SVS and BCVA on bluetongue policy, policy briefs with BEVA, to seek advice on meat inspection duties from the VPHA and more recently to be talking to BSAVA on matters of dog breeding which has suddenly come to the fore, to name but a few examples. It is a great source of comfort that if the President does not know the answer, they probably know somebody who does.

There was a great sense of achievement within the building when the new website went live last week. This is the culmination of over a year's work and I think we should be delighted with the end result. We have tried to design the site on the basis of our members' requirements and suggestions and we have worked closely with our Members' Services Group. It is a most impressive face to the Association, a source of informed opinion to the public and also a rich source of information for our members. I commend it to all of you.

## **NICK BLAYNEY'S PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS BVA CONGRESS, 27 SEPTEMBER 2008**

The Veterinary Record is not only a veterinary scientific journal with a world reputation, something that was brought home to me in spades during my foreign trips, but it is also one of the tangible benefits of being a member. Without doubt, part of the family silver. But even the family silver tarnishes without the odd polishing and the Record is currently undergoing a review of style and content. We look forward to the results in the months to come.

What better example of the diversity of initiatives that this Association has developed is there than VETS.TV. I hope that you have all taken a moment to look at this. We do see that is an exciting prospect indeed. VETS.TV is a fantastic opportunity. The success of the project hinges upon the collaboration and support from our specialist divisions, universities, the industry and the membership. It should be the portal for the profession for video information and CPD. The CPD market is huge, and it is preferable that practice CPD expenditure should be spent within the profession.

One area where we have this year seen plans come to fruition is in the development of the YVN, which was launched by my predecessor in May 2007. It is a tough world out there for young vets, within a profession which by virtue of its very structure can make for a lonely and stressful professional life. We have also seen further development of our support groups, run by vets who have trained as facilitators from BVA territorial divisions. We recognised the importance of supporting the next generation and we are delighted that a third of the facilitators trained this year were themselves recent graduates. We are very proud of what we have achieved.

We also reach out to the students and it has been my honour to address each of the schools in turn. I hope they enjoyed it as much as I did! We continue to work closely with AVS on a number of issues, and the production of EMS guides this year are a good example of this.

Another area of relationships that the BVA must nurture is that of its international professional and social responsibility. I have been lucky enough to travel extensively on behalf of the Association and I have seen for myself the role of the profession in the wider world. It is easy in a country such as ours where the standard of living allows the development of sophisticated and challenging techniques to maintain the health of individual animals to forget that the profession has a massive role in zoonoses, public health and food production. Roger Marr, past president of the AVMA and

**NICK BLAYNEY'S PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS  
BVA CONGRESS, 27 SEPTEMBER 2008**

others have been espousing the One Health One Medicine concept for some time. Let us never forget how important this profession is alongside its sister medical professions in this respect.

One of the great pleasures of my year has been working with my fellow officers. We have spent a great deal of time in each others company, we have eaten and drunk together.....and I think that is about as intimate as it got. You build up a close friendship in such circumstances and I for one shall be saddened that the party is being broken up, as it is each and every year. Our retiring officer, David Catlow has given his all to this position. His enthusiasm and cheerfulness has been a beacon. David has certainly played right up to the final whistle. This Association owes him a deal of gratitude. But as one door closes another one opens, and in walks Bill Reilly, bringing with him a complimentary but different skill set to the officer team.

And so ladies and gentlemen, that concludes my perambulation around the world of BVA and its relationships. I have been honoured to carry the torch for BVA for the last twelve months and grateful for the input into Association business from Council, Committees and the membership at large. I hand it on, able to assure our members that the association continues to work to further their interests in so very many ways.