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DOG-OWNER GROUP ALLEGES ‘DECEPTION’ ON VACCINATION

Report by

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A PET-OWNER action group has accused UK vets of being “deluded” about the frequency of small animal vaccinations.

In an open letter to the VMD, Canine Health Concern (CHC) has called for “clarity” on the scheduling of core and noncore vaccines. It also accuses vets of “deceiving” the public by promoting unnecessary annual vaccinations, and alleges that the VMD “has consistently failed to act on behalf of owners and their pets” by ignoring the issue.

The letter states: “By failing to require longer duration of immunity data from manufacturers and by failing to remove one-year vaccines from the market, the VMD is facilitating the unethical practice of annual vaccination.

“Vets in practice seem reluctant to adhere to international recommendations, and their professional bodies have failed to provide direction to their members.”

Revaccination advice is contained in a vaccine’s summary of product characteristics (SPC), approved by the VMD. Some core and non-core vaccine SPCs recommend annual boosters, while others promote triennial revaccination.

The CHC bases much of its stance on the WSAVA’s 2007 *Guidelines for the Vaccinations of Dogs and Cats*, which state: “Vaccines should not be given needlessly. Core vaccines should not be given any more frequently than every three years after the 12-month booster injection following the puppy/kitten series.”

The guidelines make reference to vets and clients being “subservient to the mantra of annual vaccination” and advise vets to stress the importance of “annual health checks” to monitor pet well-being, instead of the necessity of annual vaccination.

Catherine O’Driscoll has been campaigning on over-vaccination since founding the CHC in 1994. She stressed her respect and admiration for vets, but said she was concerned many were administering vaccines annually according to SPCs, despite WSAVA guidance to the contrary.

She believes “no one seems to want to address the fact that once immune to viral diseases, dogs and cats can remain immune for years” and called on the VMD to review SPCs.

Mrs O’Driscoll said: “There is a massive group delusion within the veterinary profession, with members’ eyes glazing over as they numb out to the known science and perform veterinary procedures that are unnecessary.

“[Some] veterinary bodies around the world have called a halt to the practice of annual vaccination. Why is the UK lagging so far behind?” She believes the VMD should ask for prolonged efficacy data to prevent over-vaccination. “The VMD allows manufacturers to license vaccine products on the basis of the number of years they’ve tested them for. This is why we have one-year vaccines – because the VMD has only required data for one year’s efficacy,” Mrs O’Driscoll said.

‘Intense pressure’

Hertfordshire-based vet Richard Allport is a member of the CHC and a cosignatory to the group’s letter to the VMD. He told *Veterinary Times*: “All vaccines, apart from the possible exception of leptospirosis, are given too frequently – and most lepto vaccines don’t give a full year’s cover. Many of my referred clients say they are on the receiving end of intense pressure to have yearly boosters, and made to feel guilty if they don’t.

“The profession should be honest about the situation and acknowledge publicly that annual boosters are not only unnecessary, but carry a degree of risk.” BSAVA spokesman Mark Johnston referred to his organisation’s policy on vaccination protocols, which states: “The VMD veterinary products committee recommends that until such time as more extensive scientific evidence is presented, there is insufficient basis to alter the current data-sheet recommendations for companion animal vaccines.”

Mr Johnston said: “All the time I’ve been in practice, I’ve seen two pets die from conditions associated with vaccinations – for example, injection-site feline sarcoma – whereas I’ve seen hundreds die from diseases that would have been prevented if owners had their pets vaccinated as recommended by the vet.”

John FitzGerald, operations director at the VMD, said SPC revaccination schedules were “supported by data to demonstrate they are appropriate” and stressed that WSAVA guidelines must be followed in conjunction with individual SPCs.

“The VMD’s role is to assess the data presented in support of a product and to reflect the outcome of the assessment in the instruction on how the product should be used – these are set out in the SPCs,” he said. “Veterinary surgeons are permitted to use a product differently where they consider there is sufficient clinical justification to do so. The WSAVA guidelines are not product specific, but provide general guidance.

“The VMD considers that the WSAVA guidelines are supplementary to and, in most cases, complement the SPC, and can be used by a veterinary surgeon when reaching the clinical decision on how to treat an animal.”